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THE NOBLE HORSE OF THE MASKED RIDER BEGAN TO SHOW HIS REMARKABLE SPEED,
AND EVERY BOUND BROUGHT HIM NEARER TO THE PURSUED.

Crack Shot Harry;

OR,

THE MASKED RIDER.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MIDDY HERBERT'S PRIZE," "ROY,
THE BOY CRUISER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TRE CHALLENGE.

IN one of the loveliest portions of the Ramapo Valley, and upon the land now belonging to one of New Jersey's ex-governors, stand the ruins of what was once one of the finest homesteads in the State.

Long years ago, when our forefathers were struggling for American independence, Glen Eden, as the estate was then called, was in its palmiest days, and the lordly owner of the broad acres and comfortable manor was General Mountjoy, a proud descendant of one of Old England's noblest families.

In early life, he had come to the English colony of America with his regiment, and becoming attached to the country, had married an American girl, and determined to make it his home.

Possessed of wealth, he resigned from the army, and sought out a quiet and lovely part of the Ramapo Valley, and there built a large and commodious mansion, surrounding it with ornamented grounds, and furnishing it with elegance and taste—a beautiful home, and well deserving the name which General Mountjoy had bestowed upon it—that of "Glen Eden."

While living in the quiet enjoyment of their home, General Mountjoy and his wife had two children born to them—a son and a daughter.

As years rolled on, the young son and heir of Glen Eden, Harry Mountjoy, grew up a marvel of youthful precocity, and was noted far and wide as the best shot in the valley.

His sister, Imogene, five years his junior, grew into loveliness as she increased in years, and there was not a farmer in the valley who, in speaking of the noble spirit, generosity and daring of Harry, but coupled, with the praise, admiration of the fair Imogene, who was as good as she was beautiful.

Thus the years glided by until, at the age of eighteen, Harry was sent by his parents to England to complete his education abroad.

Sadly was he missed from the household of Glen Eden; but after three years he returned, and around the family hearthstone, the parents were happy in the love of their children.

His European training had not altered the frank, generous nature of Harry Mountjoy, and as of old, he sought the humble fireside of the poor farmer, and was as often at the table of the hardy mountaineer as of the man of wealth, who owned his thousands of acres.

Thus, in a few months after his return from abroad, he was the same general favorite, and instead of losing his cunning by residence in foreign cities, he became more famous as a crack shot and expert swordsman.

Thus the days passed on, until a dark cloud hovered over the horizon of the Eden home.

The storm-cloud of war arose in the distance the Americans, fired with the desire for freedom writhed under the bondage of their English master, and the mutterings of the coming tempest were borne upon every wind, penetrating the mansions of the rich alike with the hovels of the poor.

Born in Old England, having borne a commission from her ruler, and led her armies on to victory in his younger days, General Mountjoy would hear of no dissenting voice against his king.

But with his son and daughter the case was different.

They were both Americans; and, more fully acquainted with the patriotic motive of their countrymen, they differed from their parents in every particular.

Harry knew his countrymen, and fully did he understand their sentiments, and appreciate their motives, for a severance of the ties which bound them to the mother country, which so cruelly had sought to impose upon her colony.

Days, weeks, months passed away, and General Mountjoy believed that his son had relinquished his foolish ideas, as he termed them, of coinciding in the views of the patriots.

The general had not been idle; but had determined upon a bold stroke to win his son over to royalism.

Knowing a long and bitter struggle was coming on, for already the first gun of hostilities had echoed through the land, he determined to use his influence in England to get Harry a commission in the English Army, and after months of patient waiting was rewarded by receiving from his Maj-sty, the King of England, a colonel's commission for his son, and an assignment to a command of a regiment of cavalry.

Delighted at the success of his plans, and confident that Harry would be dazzled by the rank of a colonelcy in his Majesty's service, General Mountjoy determined to give him a grand surprise, and for this purpose invited from New York and Philadelphia several officers of the British Navy and Army to visit him for a few days at Glen Eden.

Half a dozen or more of England's defenders came in answer to the invitation, and the three days of the visit passed most delightfully.

But upon the last day, and the one reserved by the general to make known to his son his good fortune, the scene suddenly changed.

It was after dinner, and General Mountjoy had risen in answer to a toast, and in no measured terms denounced the Americans who were struggling for freedom.

His words were received by all present, excepting Harry and Imogene, with cheers, and then turning to his son he drew from his pocket the commission and presented it to him.

In an instant Harry was upon his feet, his eyes ablaze, his bosom heaving with emotion.

"My son, what ails you? Methinks you should be honored at his Majesty's notice," said the general, while his face paled at the emotion of Harry.

"Father, I have not deserved this insult.

heart and soul I am with the Americans; his a jesty shall never make me serve in his army robbers and tyrants!" and the young man lanced around him with scorn.

General Mountjoy was so greatly chagrined, it the contrary turn that his plans had taken, that he could say nothing, and appreciating his feelings, the English officers adjourned to the front veranda to enjoy a smoke.

There they discovered Harry, and Colonel Carter, of a British regiment of infantry, determined not to pass by unheeded the insult to his king, walked up to the young man, and said:

"Mr. Mountjoy, I can not pass over unnoticed your remarks against my royal master. You must offer an apology, or I shall hold you accountable."

Wheeling upon him, Harry returned:

"Colonel Carter, I regret giving vent, in my own house, to remarks so offensive to my guests; but as you have brought me to task, I most certainly shall not retract a word."

"Hold, sir! your life shall answer for this insult!" exclaimed Colonel Carter.

"Be it so; I am ready. To-morrow at sunrise I will meet you and your friends at the ford, above here on the river, and shall be there with my seconds; is that satisfactory?"

"It is, sir: but with what weapons?"

"Either pistols or swords; suit yourself. Gentlemen, I bid you good-evening," and leaving the mansion, Harry walked toward the stables, ordered his horse, and a moment later was seen dashing away at full speed down the valley, followed by his valet, a negro man who had been with him from childhood.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL.

THE valley was yet lost in the shadow of early morning, the day following the challenge, as three horsemen rode at a rapid gallop down the rocky pathway, leading from the hills into the vale, and drew rein beneath a large tree standing upon the banks of the Ramapo.

One of the three men was easily recognized as Harry Mountjoy, and another as his negro valet, while the third was dressed in hunting costume, and except for a careless, dissipated look, would have been called remarkably handsome.

A certain reckless, dare-devil expression about the eyes and mouth marred the face of Wilda Templeton.

Left, at eighteen years of age, by the death of his mother, sole heir to a large farm and considerable other property, he was rapidly going through his estate, and leading a dissolute life, he gradually became an outcast from the society of the families in the valley.

Harry had been a college mate of Wilda's when abroad, but the latter being expelled from the university had returned to America, and resumed the reckless extravagance he had learned in the gay capitals of Europe.

Though he did not like the wild life that Wilda led, Harry had always looked upon him as a friend and pitied his misfortunes; and, feeling assured that he could trust him in a serious difficulty, he had ridden to the Templeton farm, rapidly going to decay under the mismanagement of its master, and told him of the challenge

that had been given, and of its acceptance for the following morning.

For a wonder Wilda was not drinking, listened to his friend's story, and willingly promised to aid him.

Thus it was arranged, and after passing the night at the Templeton farm the young men, accompanied by Harry's servant, went at an early hour to the place of meeting.

Shortly after their arrival Colonel Carter and several of his friends arrived, having come on foot from Glen Eden, for fear of arousing the inmates and giving them an idea of what was about to transpire.

The preliminaries were soon arranged; pistols were the weapons agreed upon, and the ten paces were stepped off by Wilda Templeton.

The principals took their positions just as the first straggling ray of the rising sun appeared above the distant hills, and the second of Harry, having won the word, stepped one side, and in clear tones asked:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Ready," said Colonel Carter, while Harry answered by a bow.

"One! Two! Three! Fire!" and during the time given the weapons of each principal flashed, the reports cut keenly through the early morning air, and echoed and re-echoed against the hillsides and in the mountain glens.

Dropping his pistol upon the ground, Harry folded his arms and gazed upon his antagonist, who stood a moment, as if carved out of stone, and then without a word fell forward upon his face, dead. The bullet from Harry's pistol had entered his heart.

"You are not wounded, Harry?" and Wilda Templeton sprung toward him.

"Only a flesh wound in the arm, Wilda. Come, I will go home with you," and then turning to the grief-stricken English officers he continued:

"Gentlemen, no one can regret this unhappy termination to your visit to Glen Eden more than myself. Take the body of Colonel Carter to the mansion;" and bowing low, Harry turned, mounted his horse, and, accompanied by Wilda and his servant, rode away.

CHAPTER III.

THE MASKED RIDER.

At the head of the small squadron, consisting of fifty men, rides an elderly man, whose firm seat in the saddle, close-fitting uniform, bronzed face, lighted up by dark eyes and softened by white hair and mustache, prove him every inch a soldier.

By his side rides a young man, uniformed as an *aide-de-camp*, and like his superior, well mounted and armed, as are also the body of fine-looking cavalrymen who gallop closely in the rear of their officers.

In silence the party dashed on for half a mile, when they suddenly drew rein, and listened attentively.

"It was certainly a shot; ha! there 'tis again, colon'l," said the *aide*, still listening.

"Yes—we are evidently in close quarters, lieutenant; but we must never say die, as long as there is a ghost of a hope for our escape; but what to do, I am at a loss to know."

"True, colonel; we are as likely to ride into

the enemy's camp as our own—in fact more so, for we have no troops on this side of the river."

"Let us press on then, and strive to reach the ford. We are assured of the danger from behind, for that cavalry regiment is evidently in pursuit, while we can only guess at what lies before us. Forward!" and once more the squadron dashed on.

Night came on, and a dense darkness settled upon the valley; but still, on the horsemen pressed for miles, until they were startled by hearing a distant shot, then a loud challenge, a shout, and the rattle of a drum echoing through the vale.

Instantly all drew rein and listened, and then came the sound of hoofs rushing along the road in rapid flight, and the next moment a horseman dashed into their very midst, while a dozen strong arms seized his bridle.

Resistance was useless, and recognizing that fact at a glance, the horseman said, sullenly:

"I surrender."

"There is no other course for you to pursue, sir. Who are you?" returned the cavalry officer.

"My name is Westley Moore. I am a captain on the staff of one of Washington's generals."

"Ha! say you so, my fine fellow? We are friends, then, for I am Colonel Dudley Conrad, commander of the First Regiment Independent Dragoons, and this gentleman is Lieutenant Monette, of my staff."

The officers warmly grasped hands, and then Captain Moore said:

"I was taken prisoner this morning, and have just escaped from the guard, who were carrying me to the English headquarters; but what do you here?"

"I made a raid upon a wagon-train this morning, was cut off from my regiment with only these few men, and am now trying to extricate myself from the enemy's lines."

"Hark! I hear the approach of hoofs: 'tis of but one horse. Let us form on either side of the road and take him," continued the colonel, hastily, and quickly the men concealed themselves.

But the sound had died away, and in surprise all awaited in silence, when Colonel Conrad said, in a low tone:

"Strange! He could not have known of our presence, or discovered us—"

"I did discover you," said a deep, stern voice, while from the shadow of a large tree overhanging the roadside came the dark forms of a horse and rider.

The face of the rider was totally concealed by a close-fitting mask.

Like an apparition he had appeared in the midst of the squadron, and in silence all gazed upon him until some moments had passed, when his deep tones were again heard:

"Is this not an American company of cavalry?"

"It is, sir," answered Colonel Conrad.

"You are in a most dangerous vicinity here; the English forces entirely surround you."

"We are aware of that, Sir Stranger; but who are you, and why are you here?"

"Who I am matters not; why I am here I can explain by saying, I was riding down this road;

my horse espied danger, and, turning into a by-path, I came upon you."

"Do you belong to the British army?" asked Westley Moore.

"Pardon me if I decline to say; you are Americans, and for certain reasons I desire to serve you. I am the only man that can lead you out of the trap into which you have fallen. Do you dare follow me?"

"We dare do a great deal, sir, to extricate ourselves from our present dangerous position, and I am willing to follow you; but let me warn you that if you entrap us, your instant death shall be the consequence," sternly said Colonel Conrad.

"Keep your warnings, sir, for those who need them. Follow me, and I will lead you by a path over the mountains, to a position of safety; but perhaps you may have to make a bold dash through a line of English infantry."

"We are ready, sir; lead on."

Whirling his horse, the Masked Rider said:

"Form your men in Indian file, and follow me," and turning from the road he entered the forest, followed by the long line of horsemen, who wound through the dark wood, and up the mountain's side, like an immense serpent creeping upon its prey.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOLD DASH.

UP the dark and steep side of the mountain, the Masked Rider led the way for some miles, when he halted upon an open space upon the top of the range, and pointed to the valley far below.

Turning to Colonel Conrad, he said:

"There lies the valley, sir, and you can readily see, by the camp-fires up and down its course, that you were completely hemmed in when I found you."

"You are right, sir; but can I ask how we are to get out of these mountains?"

"I intend to lead you along the top of the ridge, sir, and then descend into the valley again, ten miles from this point, where there is a ford across the river; but it is guarded by a regiment of infantry; we can ride upon them before they will know of our presence, and cut right through their ranks and escape to the open country beyond," answered the Masked Rider.

At length the valley was reached, and seeing that the whole force were close together, the guide halted, and turning to Colonel Conrad, said:

"I have brought you a roundabout way, but it was the only chance you had of escaping capture; and Colonel Conrad and his brave troopers are too valuable to the American army for the English to have given them up, had they captured them."

"Ha! you know me, then?" exclaimed the colonel, in surprise.

"Yes, I know you, sir, and your *aide*, Lieutenant Monette. You attempted a bold dash, this morning, to burn the British wagon-train; you partly succeeded; but, being driven off, became separated from your regiment, and sought safety in the Ramapo Hills."

"Indeed you do know me; can I ask how you gain your information, sir?"

"You can ask, sir; but pardon me if I decline to answer. The gentleman with you is Captain Westley Moore, of General Arnold's staff, and sent on by that officer to confer with Washington. He was captured, to-day, while asleep upon the river-bank; made his escape to-night from his guard, and if he had not run upon you as he did, would have been retaken a mile further down the valley, by the British."

"You are a wonderful man, and I would that we knew more of you," said the old colonel, gazing intently upon the masked face before him.

"I trust you will know more of me before this war is over; but now to work. Let your men all dismount, readjust their saddle-girths, and look to their arms.

"I will lead you until you strike the picket-line at the ford, and then, if you miss me, keep straight across the river, turn up the left bank, and ride on until you come to a log-cabin; knock at the door and ask for one Ebon, a negro, and say that the Masked Rider bade you tell him to guide you to the American lines in safety."

And as the guide spoke, he arose in his stirrups, took his bridle-rein well in hand, and drew his saber.

Without a word, the horsemen followed his example, and leading the way, the guide moved on.

"Now, gentlemen, are you ready?" suddenly asked the guide.

"All ready!" answered the colonel, and then, in quick, ringing tones, the stranger's voice rung out:

"Attention, regiment! Form fours! Forward! Charge!"

The Rider shook his bridle-rein, his horse bounded forward, and, followed by the little band, he bore like a tornado down upon a line of frightened soldiers, who, taken by surprise, ran hither and thither, and attempted frantically to oppose the onset of the Americans.

The ford was reached; the guard was ridden down, with the loss of a few troopers; the river was crossed, and with a yell the Americans gained the other shore, and wheeled up the left bank at full speed.

The guide had disappeared, none knew whither, and without wasting more time, the colonel led his troopers on at a rapid gallop, and after a ride of some distance, came in sight of the walls of the cabin the guide had spoken of, glistening in the moonlight.

Riding up to the door, Colonel Conrad gave a hard knock with the hilt of his sword, and was answered by a gruff voice from within, that inquired:

"Who is there?"

"I wish a guide to conduct me to the American lines," answered the colonel.

"You will have to go elsewhere for one, then," returned the same gruff voice.

"I was told I would find one here."

"Who told you so?"

"The Masked Rider."

"Ha!" and the tones of the voice were changed as they asked:

"Who did he tell you to inquire for?"

"Ebon, a negro," answered the colonel.

"All right, sir; I will be with you in a moment," was the reply.

In a few moments the door of the hut swung open, and a tall, muscular negro, almost a giant in size, stepped out into the moonlight, followed by a coal-black horse, large and powerful in build, like his master.

With a bound the negro was in the saddle, and his quick eye having, at a glance, taken in the party, he saluted by touching his hat to Colonel Conrad, and said:

"I am ready, sir; where would you have me lead you?"

"To the nearest point where we can strike the lines of the American army," answered the colonel.

"All right, sir; it is a ride of fifteen miles; but follow me;" and with a word to his horse, the noble steed sprung forward, and the squadron following, away they dashed at a rapid gait over hill and dale.

The miles flew behind them; still the sable guide kept on in silence, never once turning in his saddle to see if he was followed.

At length the guide drew rein, pointed to a distant light, and saying, "Yonder is the advanced post of the American army," wheeled, and without another word dashed away, and was soon out of sight in the darkness.

In vain did the colonel and his men cry to the negro to halt; he had done what the Masked Rider had commanded, and hence rode away.

"Well, if that fellow is not kin to Old Nick, may I be hung for a rebel," said Colonel Conrad, as he gazed in the direction in which the negro had disappeared.

Again the squadron moved on, and in half an hour more were challenged by the outer picket of the American army.

"Advance and give the countersign!" came the stern order, and dismounting, Colonel Conrad walked forward alone, was recognized by the guard, and soon after officers and men were seeking, in safety, the repose they so much needed after the fatigues and adventures of the day.

CHAPTER V. THE COMMISSION.

At the first volley poured upon the Americans by the English at the ford, the Masked Rider wheeled suddenly from the road into the forest, and in the confusion his absence was not noted, until the squadron reached the other side of the river.

Being hidden by the darkness of the woods, the Rider sped onward at a rapid gallop until he had proceeded a mile or more, when he turned into a pathway leading into a broad road that wound along at the base of the mountain, and into the density of the forest again.

Rapidly he pursued his course for an hour, and then checking the speed of his horse, slowly advanced, cautiously glancing ahead of him and upon either side.

Halting beside a fallen tree, he listened for some moments in silence, and then slowly moved on again.

He had proceeded only a few rods, when a stern voice called out:

"Stand! or I fire!"

"I would see General Clinton," answered the scout, as he halted.

"Advance, and I will send you to him under guard," called out the sentinel, and muttering to himself, "I was wrong not to take the countersign to-night," the horseman rode on until he came upon a small body of men, assembled by the roadside.

"It is the Masked Rider," exclaimed several voices, and then the sentinel said:

"Pass on, sir; the general is in his quarters."

Leaving his horse standing alone, the Rider advanced to the door of the cabin, and entered, the sentinel on duty admitting him without a word.

In a room to the right of the door were half a dozen officers seated around a table, which was spread over with maps and plans of battles.

"Ha! my masked friend, you are true to your word, I see, and are just in time," said an officer, dressed in the showy British uniform, and covered with decorations, arising and extending his hand toward the stranger.

"Yes, it is not yet midnight, general, and that is the hour I said I would come," returned the Rider, in quiet tones, and yet his voice had a certain metallic ring that denoted determination and courage.

"Gentlemen, I have to present to you my friend and *aide*, the Masked Rider, for by no other name is he known to the army. These gentlemen, sir, are the commanders of the English forces now operating in this section of the country;" and at the introduction, while the British generals bowed cordially, the Rider bent his head in a haughty manner, and took the seat motioned to him by General Clinton, not even deigning to remove his hat in the presence of such a brilliant assemblage of England's noblemen.

When all were again seated around the table General Clinton observed, turning to the Rider:

"We were just discussing the advisability of making a move upon the American army in a few days, and I informed my officers present, that it was desirable that we should first gain some satisfactory information regarding the movements of the rebels, their intentions, numbers, and plans of fortifications; and to secure this knowledge, I had decided upon yourself as best suited to carry out my plans; hence I sent for you to be here to-night."

A bow from the Rider alone proved that he was listening, and while the assembled officers gazed upon the masked face before them with renewed interest, General Clinton continued:

"I know of no man in the British army who has the courage and ability to carry out my plans as successfully as yourself."

"But first let me ask you: did you hear of the attack upon the wagon-train down the valley, this morning, by Colonel Conrad's dragoons?"

"I did, sir: about forty of them were cut off from the regiment, by the unexpected arrival of Colonel Hunter's force, and took refuge in the mountains. The squad thus cut off were led by Colonel Conrad in person, and his *aide*, Lieutenant Monette."

"You surprise me. This is good news, for their capture is certain," exclaimed the general, with enthusiasm.

"You mistake, sir; they came on up the valley and escaped by the ford, some miles below here,

cutting their way through the regiment on guard—"

"Too bad! too bad! I would give a great deal to capture that arch-rebel Conrad, and when he was in our very clutches, to thus have him escape is really shameful. That accounts for the firing down the valley to-night."

"Yes, sir, and I would also tell you that Captain Westley Moore, of Arnold's staff, has also escaped, by killing one of his guard, wheeling his horse, and getting off before he could be followed."

A curse was smothered back by General Clinton, as he rejoined:

"This is gross neglect upon the part of some officer, and shall be looked into; but now, I have more important work on hand. Come nearer, gentlemen, and listen to my plans and remember, Rider, you will have to go at a great risk, and if caught, suffer the penalty."

"I am willing to take the consequences, general."

The officers all gathered closely around the table, the Rider occupying the position to the right of General Clinton, and for half an hour they were busy going over the plans for the perilous undertaking, the information to be gained and other important affairs.

At length General Clinton turned and said:

"You now understand all I would have you do; and you are ready to depart, when?"

"To-night."

"So much the better, and when you return with the information I desire, I will make you a full colonel in his Majesty's service."

"Under what name, general?"

"By the king, if I know, sir: I suppose we will have to make out the commission to the 'Masked Rider,'" answered the general, pleasantly, and then he continued: "You doubtless have some good reason for thus veiling your features from your fellow-men, and into that motive it does not behove us to look; you certainly have rendered valuable service to his Majesty, and I assure you I shall never seek, through idle curiosity, to solve the mystery of the mask."

"I thank, you, sir; you have now no other instructions to give?"

"None; and may God speed you upon your dangerous enterprise." And General Clinton extended his hand, which the Rider grasped, without removing his gauntlet glove, and, bowing to the other officers, turned and walked from the room.

Mounting his horse, which had patiently stood and awaited his coming, the Rider rode off at a rapid gallop, and soon was lost to the sight of those who were watching him from the cabin door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE.

Upon a lonely day, in September, 18—, a large traveling carriage, drawn by two strong horses, and driven by a negro coachman, was slowly ascending a steep hill, upon one of the army roads leading through New Jersey to New York; and the sable driver was inwardly congratulating himself upon the near approach to his journey's end, when a loud shout was heard, and the next moment two cavalrymen, acting as a guard to the

carriage, came dashing down the road, and halted beside the vehicle, while one of the men touched his hat and exclaimed:

"There is a crowd of men, miss, gathered at the top of the hill, and they look like a band of renegades."

"Then what are we to do, Caldwell?" asked a sweet voice, while the lovely face of a woman looked from the carriage window.

"I am sure I do not know, miss. Your father had no idea we would meet with danger upon this road," answered the soldier.

"Are you certain that they are a band of renegades?" asked another voice from the carriage, and the face of an elderly woman appeared at the window.

"Yes, madam; they shouted to us as we turned, and no doubt have surrounded us, and there is no place we can go to for safety," remarked the other soldier.

"Then we might as well proceed, and at once face the danger," rejoined the maiden, and she then continued, addressing the negro coachman: "Drive on, Jacko."

"Yes, miss." And the horses were again started forward, while the restless eyes of the negro eagerly scanned the summit of the hill.

Slowly the horses drew the heavy carriage up the ascent, and had nearly reached the top, when a volley of musketry broke the quiet; a whistling of bullets came through the air, and the two cavalrymen fell dead from their saddles, pierced by half a dozen balls, while the frightened but unhurt negro sprung from his box and sought safety under the vehicle, for the horses, as if accustomed to the report of firearms, stood motionless in the road.

A faint cry was heard from the carriage, and the door was hastily opened and a young girl of seventeen, with a deathly-pale but beautiful face, sprung out and, boldly looked around her upon a motley crew of renegades, who, after firing a volley, had rushed forward and surrounded the carriage.

"Cowards, dare you thus fire upon a private carriage containing women?" and the beautiful form was drawn proudly erect, while the deep-blue eyes, heavily-shaded by long, dark lashes, flashed with the fire of anger and contempt.

"I knew not that there were women in the carriage. I see I have gained a greater prize than I anticipated," said one of the renegades, stepping forward, and at the same time touching his hat.

His manner and conversation betokened that at some time, in bygone years, he had been a gentleman; but from the cold, handsome face, all mercy, all refinement were rapidly fading away; and as he addressed the frightened girl before him, his voice was harsh and impudent. He was none other than Wilda the Renegade.

"Here, you fellows!" he called out to the half-dozen wild-looking desperadoes who accompanied him; "keep a lookout over the hill yonder, or we may have some of Conrad's dragoons upon us;" and then, turning to the maiden, he continued:

"I see you have a companion in the carriage—your mother, doubtless?"

"No; my mother is dead. That lady is my governess."

"Your reason for committing murder, and stopping us upon the highway, was to rob, was it?" sneeringly asked the young girl.

"I must have all the spare change you carry, your jewels, and those belonging to your governess, for I see she has ear-drops and a brooch."

"Oh, Geraldine," exclaimed the lady in the carriage, who had at first fainted, when she saw the cavalrymen shot down, and had just returned to consciousness—"Oh, Geraldine! is there no hope for us?"

"None, I fear, Mrs. Vance. These are robbers, and we must submit."

"Be careful, young lady; I like not such harsh names, and you may have cause to repent using them;" and the renegade chief's brow darkened, while a more cruel light came into his eyes.

"I do not doubt, Sir Robber, that you are capable of any crime. Mrs. Vance, we must submit. Here are my jewels, and this book contains money. I suppose we can keep our horses and carriage?" asked the spirited girl, as she divested herself of her jewelry.

"The horses are good ones; I will give you two of mine in their place; and as regards the ark, we are too far from water to make it useful."

And at the remark of their chief, the assembled renegades laughed; while he continued, addressing the negro coachman, who yet remained beneath the carriage. "I say, Africarus, unroll yourself and come out from there, for I wish to levy a tax upon you, well knowing that gentlemen of your color always carry hard cash about with them."

Poor Jacko crawled out, looking rather crest-fallen; and the bodies of the dead cavalrymen having been stripped of their valuables, and their horses secured, the chief stepped forward to take the jewels the maiden held in her hand, when one of the renegades exclaimed:

"Listen, captain!" and as he spoke, over the summit of the hill, and coming down a rocky and steep by-path, a horseman appeared in sight.

At a glance, Wilda seemed to recognize the position of affairs at the roadside, and driving the spurs into his steed, he dashed at a run down the break-neck pathway, steadyng his horse with an iron hand, while in the other he held a pistol.

"Ha! the Masked Rider! Away, men! away! Curses light upon him!" exclaimed the chief, as he made a grab at the jewels in the maiden's hand, but which he failed to secure, as she sprung aside and evaded him.

A few more mighty bounds of his powerful horse, a frightful leap over a wide chasm, and the horseman was in range, and he slowly raised his pistol, aimed and fired.

A shriek—a curse—and a renegade sunk to the ground.

Another instant, and the stranger was upon the scene, and, drawing his saber, he with a sweep through the air, cut another robber from his saddle, and without a moment's hesitation, wheeled in pursuit of the chief; but, as if perceiving that he could not overtake him, he drew rein, and returned to the carriage, where the two ladies, in breathless suspense, awaited his coming.

As he approached, he half-raised his hat, and dismounting, said quickly:

"I hope I was in time to prevent your being robbed, ladies?"

"Ah, how can we thank you, sir, for your noble conduct? You have saved us more than we can ever repay you for; but believe me, we are thankful!"

The Masked Rider gazed for an instant upon the lovely face before him, and then replied:

"I see you have lost your escort of two men. You must not linger here; but proceed upon your way, and I will act as your guide to a place of safety. Here, my man, take what you can find upon the bodies of these two bandits, for doubtless they are rich in valuables, and then get ready to move on."

"Fortunately, you have prevented our sustaining other damage than the loss of poor Caldwell and Morton, who were favorite soldiers of my father; but perhaps I should say that I am now journeying to the American lines to see my father, Colonel Dudley Conrad."

"I have met him; only night before last he escaped from the British lines," returned the Rider bowing, and while he turned to aid Jacko in hitching his horses to the carriage—for the robbers had unharnessed them—the two ladies gazed in admiration at the superb form of their deliverer, and wondered strangely at the mystery of his wearing a mask.

All being in readiness to start, the Masked Rider gallantly aided the ladies into their carriage, and mounting his noble charger, led the way once more up the steep hill.

For miles they continued their journey without interruption, and then the Rider, who was riding some distance in advance, was seen to stop, and immediately after a horseman joined him, when the two rode back toward the carriage.

Motioning to Jacko to stop, the Rider rode up to the window of the vehicle, and said:

"You are now in safety, for a troop of your father's cavalry is coming up the road. Pardon me if I leave you;" and politely touching his hat, he was turning to ride off, when Geraldine Conrad exclaimed:

"One moment, please, sir. Will you not tell me who you are, that I may let my father know to whom he owes so great a service?"

"I am known as the 'Masked Rider,' lady."

With a bow he wheeled his horse and dashed into the forest, followed by the horseman who had joined him, and in whom the reader will recognize the negro guide, Ebon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASKED RIDER'S RETREAT.

AFTER bidding adieu to Geraldine Conrad and Mrs. Vance, the Masked Rider rapidly dashed away, followed closely by Ebon.

For miles they rode on in silence, and darkness surrounded them, but on they pressed until they entered a narrow glen, with steep, thickly-wooded sides, running back into the mountains.

"Night-hawk has not yet discovered us," said the Masked Rider to Ebon; but as he spoke, a dark form came from the shadows and approached them.

"Ha, Night-hawk, I just said you had not seen us," said the Rider, while the person addressed, who was a tall, finely-formed Indian, clad in a buckskin suit, and wearing a crest of feathers upon his head, answered:

"Me saw you. Come in cabin; have much to tell you."

"Yes, Ebon told me you had important news, so I turned back, as I was on my way into the American lines. But, let us go into the cabin," and telling the negro to look well after the horses, the Masked Rider entered the low wooden structure, built of logs, and containing two rooms.

An Indian squaw, the wife of Night-hawk, was busy before a fire, preparing a savory meal, and around the cabin were numerous signs of comfort, which showed that the inmates did not lack the necessities of life in their lonely abode.

Seating himself in a chair near the table, the Rider addressed a few words pleasantly to the Indian woman, after which he turned to Night-hawk, who was seated near him.

"Chief, I was bound upon a trip into the American lines, and upon a mission for General Clinton, when I met Ebon, who told me you were anxious to see me, so I returned."

"Yes, the English put guard of three men upon ford near Hazlewood; take them 'way every three night; Americans get caught then."

Though the chief's information was not very explicit, the Masked Rider saw the importance of it, for the Hazlewood ford had hitherto been left unguarded by either army, and now that the English had placed a picket there, it was certain that they would make some move upon the American lines from that quarter.

"Me lie hid, and hear all talk; expect force of Americans on raid; let them cross ford, then run to nearest regiment, tell it to come and ambush for Americans on way back."

"Yes, I see all; a raid was intended by the Americans, and they were to cross at this ford, and rush down the valley to burn the supply depot below here; but by this outpost being placed there, the cavalry regiments above could be warned and gain the ford in time to cut off their retreat. This is important news, chief, and as to-morrow night is the time set down in the raid, we have the day before us for rest and preparation. When was the guard placed there?"

"Three nights ago; another new guard placed there to-night."

"Well, to-morrow night we must relieve them from duty forever. But come; I am hungry, and your good wife is ready for our attack, so let us at once to supper."

After eating a hearty meal, the Masked Rider threw himself upon a rude but neat bed, and was soon fast asleep, while the chief and Ebon, after smoking their pipes, soon prepared to follow his example.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOWN BY THE FORD.

NIGHT-SHADES were gathering fast in the Ramapo Valley, the evening following the incidents related in the last chapter, when three horsemen suddenly emerged from the misty wa-

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s of the fall overhanging the secret cavern, and wended their way down the steep mountain-side.

Arriving in the gloom of the valley, the one advance halted, and turning to his nearest companion, said:

"Now, Ebon, you hasten back to your cabin, while the chief and myself look after this English outpost. Get what information you can, and if all goes well I will be with you by the morning, on my way to the American lines."

"Yes, sir," and without another word, the giant negro put spurs to his powerful horse and rode away, while the Masked Rider and the Indian turned up the valley.

For miles they rode along, carefully guarding against surprise, and always on the alert to detect danger in the slightest suspicious sound.

At length the river-bank was reached, and drawing up in the shadow of a large tree, the Indian dismounted, and fastening his horse to a limb, said:

"In that bunch of trees stand guard; one wake, two sleep. I kill them."

"Lead on, chief; I will dismount and follow, so as to aid you, if you require it;" and also dismounting, the Masked Rider followed slowly the retreating form of the Indian.

Soon it was lost to sight in the darkness, and there was no sound to break the stillness.

Patiently the Rider stood and waited until fifteen minutes had gone by, and then a piercing cry for help rung out, startling the quietude of the woods, and then again all was silent.

Rapidly did the Masked Rider bound toward the sound, and in a moment he stood beside the tall form of the Indian chief.

"Well, Night-hawk?" he queried.

"All dead," was the laconic response of the Indian, as he pointed to two dark forms lying upon the ground near by, and then turning, led the way to where, upon the river-bank, another body of a man lay dead.

"We must now watch for the approach of the American cavalry; ere long they will be here, and you must guide them, chief, down the valley, and then leave them. I will return from the American camps in three days, so meet me at Ebon's cabin."

"Me be there. Listen!" and as the Indian spoke, the sound of approaching feet could be heard.

A low cry brought the Rider's horse to him, and telling the Indian to await him, he sprung into the saddle and rode forward to the ford.

Soon several horsemen could be seen dimly through the darkness, slowly approaching the ford, and in a clear voice the Rider hailed:

"Stand!"

Seeing that his challenge had created a commotion, the Rider again called out:

"Tell your commander to come to the ford and I will meet him," and he immediately rode into the water and commenced to cross the stream.

Before he had reached the other side, a horseman rode forward alone, and the next moment the Rider and Colonel Conrad were face to face.

"You here—the Masked Rider?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Gently, colonel; I would not be known. I knew of your raid, and having found that an outpost was stationed here, to warn the cavalry when it passed, so as to ambush you on your return, I came here to meet you."

"What, you are, then, an American spy?"

"It matters not what I am. I have proved my willingness to serve you once, and now, in all I may do, I can only be known to the superior officers upon either side, and not to the men, for they might betray me."

"I have already much to thank you for; you saved my daughter and her governess from great annoyance and loss, two days ago; perhaps from worse—"

"We'll not discuss that, colonel. Circumstances, which I can not explain, caused me to remove the guard from this ford—"

"They are no longer here, then?"

"Call your aide, Lieutenant Monette, and accompany me to the other side of the river."

With perfect trust in the mysterious man before him, Colonel Conrad called out to one of his troopers, who sat upon his horse some thirty yards distant, to send his aide to him, and a few moments after the handsome lieutenant rode up, and with surprise greeted the Masked Rider.

"Now, gentlemen, come with me across the river," said the Rider, leading the way, and soon after the three were beneath the shadows of the trees upon the opposite bank.

A low call brought the Indian chief to their side, and then the Rider said, pointing to the dead bodies of the British soldiers:

"There lie the men who were guarding this ford; no opposition will now meet you, and the chief will guide you down the valley. I would not have him seen by your men, or seen in your company by the British, so he will ride a hundred yards in advance, and if there is danger will warn you by the shrill cry of a fox."

"In conclusion, let me beg that you never mention who were your guides, or that you met either of us here, or have ever seen the negro, Ebon, who conducted you to the American lines."

"You can trust us with your life. You are a strange, a most mysterious man, and I would that I knew more of you."

"Perhaps one day you may, colonel; now I am masked to both friend and foe," and turning to the chief the Rider addressed him in the Indian tongue, and saluting the colonel and his aide, without another word rode away and was lost in the gloom of the forest.

"Well, chief, we are ready; you serve under a strange master."

"He good man; save Night-hawk's life; Night-hawk, Masked Rider and Ebon friends—come."

"Lieutenant, order the men over, and let us on," returned the colonel, and after giving the officer some instructions as to the roads and different commands of the enemy, the Indian took his station far ahead, and soon after the regiment was moving at a rapid gallop down the valley.

Relying upon their guards at the fords, the British were not expecting an attack within their lines, and therefore the gallant troopers of Colonel Conrad were upon them before any resistance could be made.

Then he gave the order to charge, and the enemy were ridden down before resistance could be offered.

Daylight broke as the successful raiders recrossed Hazlewood Ford and rode away toward the American lines, where they arrived in safety, and then the old colonel and his aide hastened to Washington's headquarters to report the great success of his expedition.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW DANGERS.

WHAT was Colonel Conrad's surprise upon entering the presence of the commander-in-chief to find there the Masked Rider, the reader may imagine.

Seated at a table, upon which were spread maps and numbers of letters and reports, was General Washington, engaged in earnest conversation with the only other person present—the Masked Rider.

Upon the entrance of Colonel Conrad, the chief arose, and warmly greeting him, said:

"I know you have come to tell me of the success of your expedition, colonel, and as my unknown friend here signified his willingness to meet you, I sent for you to enter."

"Yes, general, I was successful, but had it not been for that man, would have been totally defeated."

"Now, general, I will return to my room and await until dark to leave the lines. I think we fully understand each other," said the Rider, arising. Saluting the chief and the colonel, he walked from the room.

"Who is that man, general?—or isn't it a fair question?"

"I do not know, colonel. Months ago he came to my quarters, masked as he is now, and brought me most valuable information. He certainly enjoys my confidence, and to-night I have given him a full protection paper throughout my lines, and the same pass he also holds from the British commanders, with whom he is on the most intimate terms."

"No one knows him [otherwise than by the name of the Masked Rider," said General Washington, with a puzzled expression upon his fine face.

"To me, also, he is an enigma; but thrice he has shown me good service, and thrice aided my command, and I certainly can not doubt him," returned Colonel Conrad, and then he and the general were busy for hours over plans for the future movements of the army.

He was just ready to depart from the American lines, his horse standing awaiting him at the door, for he had chosen to remain until dark that he might not be seen by the soldiery.

Just as he was about to leave, with a fervent "God speed you," from the chief, rapid steps were heard, and the next moment Colonel Conrad entered the room, his face pale and stern.

"Well, colonel, what is it?" asked General Washington, anxiously.

"Pardon my hasty intrusion, general; but a raiding party of British have entered our lines, and after plundering my quarters, have fled, carrying with them my daughter, and I wish to obtain consent to pursue."

"Certainly, and—"

"Hold!" and the deep voice of the Masked Rider interrupted as he continued:

"Pardon me, general; but how know you colonel, that they were British?"

"They came to my quarters—I was away but they were mounted and in the British uniform."

The Masked Rider thought a moment, and then said, slowly:

"There is no command of English cavalry that could have made this raid; it was the band of Wilda the Renegade."

"Oh God! my poor, poor Geraldine," claimed the old officer, and all felt for him in grief, for they well knew the reckless character of the renegade leader.

"Colonel, you could never retake your daughter: *I can*. Wilda will sell her at a ransom. She is taken into the British lines—and it is like that she will be, for safe-keeping—I will rescue her. If he takes her to his retreat, I will follow him and gain her release; so do not feel too great uneasiness on her account; and until you hear from me make no move in the matter. Now, gentlemen, I bid you good-evening." And half raising his plumed hat the Masked Rider turned and left the room, and soon after the rapidly-retreating sound of hoofs proved he was leaving the American lines, to confront new dangers continually arising before him in the mysterious life he led.

CHAPTER X.

THE RENEGADE'S BOOTY.

THE Masked Rider had indeed spoken truly when he said that Wilda, and not the British, had made the raid upon Colonel Conrad's quarters and carried off Geraldine.

Disappointed by his attack upon the carriage of Geraldine, Wilda, the renegade leader, determined upon revenge, and immediately set about his preparations to carry out his evil plans.

Selecting about thirty of his best men, he dressed them up in the uniform of an English cavalry regiment, and by his thorough knowledge of the country, led his company into the very lines of the Americans ere they were discovered.

The quarters of Colonel Conrad were at once sought out, and while his men plundered to their hearts' content, the renegade leader seized the fair form of Geraldine, and bore her away from the house.

Her own riding-horse was taken from the stable, and being quickly saddled, Geraldine was mounted upon him, and away the party dashed, the poor girl being intimidated by threats from making any resistance.

Rapidly Wilda dashed away, holding firmly the rein of Geraldine's horse, and followed by his men, laden down with stolen property.

Taking an unfrequented path, the renegade led the way for miles adown the valley, until he at length came to a rugged road leading up the mountain-side.

Turning into this, the small cavalcade continued their way for two miles more, slowly climbing the steep path, when they came upon a small wooded spot of land, through which the

glimmer of a number of lights could be seen, for it was then late at night.

Geraldine glanced around her, and discovered that she was in a kind of village, consisting of about a dozen log huts, strongly built, and she knew it was the stronghold of the renegades, and in the very heart of the mountains.

For the first time since her capture, her brave heart failed her, and she felt that she was indeed at the mercy of a lawless set, who would hesitate at no crime.

"Allow me to aid you to dismount, Miss Conrad?" said the chief, politely, as they drew rein in front of a rather comfortable-looking cabin.

Disdaining his assistance, Geraldine sprung to the ground, and was ushered into the cabin of Wilda, who said:

"This is to be your home for a short time, Miss Conrad, and you shall receive every attention. My own negro cook will look after your wants and remain in the cabin with you, so ask her for whatever you may desire to make you comfortable."

"Why am I your captive? Why this indig-
nity?" asked Geraldine, haughtily.

"In a pecuniary sense, you are of great value, Miss Conrad. Your fond father will pay a large ransom for you, and the English also would be only too happy to have in their power the daughter of Colonel Conrad. I sell to the highest bidder."

The young girl made no reply, but signified her desire to be alone, and the renegade leader retired; the moment after, a negro woman, with a pleasant, kind face, entered and said:

"Missy, I'se glad to see you, honey; dat debil Wilda won't keep you long, if your daddy pay for you. Now, chile, don't you take on, and old Chloe will fix you all right."

Geraldine was so thankful for the kind words that she could have thrown herself upon the old woman's shoulder and wept; but still the uncertainty of whether she was honest or not entered her mind, and she simply thanked Chloe, and expressed a desire to go to bed, as she was completely worn out by her long and hard ride.

The following morning Geraldine told Chloe to seek Wilda, and request him to come to her, and half an hour after the handsome, but reckless and wicked man stood before her.

Slightly inclining her head in answer to the renegade's salutation, the maiden said:

"I sent for you, sir, to ask the amount of ransom you demand before you return me to my father?"

"That I have not fully decided upon. Your father is rich, and will pay largely for your freedom; but then the English Government might give me some terms I demand in return for you; for, with you in their hands, the British generals might find it greatly to their advantage."

"I am, then, wholly at your pleasure and control, it seems. Both gold and advantage to you are in the scales against me."

"True. I will at once dispatch a messenger to your father to learn his terms, while I visit the British lines to see what kind of a bargain I can drive there."

"In the mean time, Miss Conrad, Chloe will

look to your comfort, and excepting that you will be closely guarded, you will be allowed considerable freedom. To-morrow I will see you again." And raising his hat, the renegade leader left the cabin, and a few moments after mounted his horse and rode away alone from the stronghold.

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING ADVENTURE.

AFTER leaving his mountain retreat, Wilda, the renegade leader, urged his horse forward at a rapid pace for several miles, and then coming to where the road was exceedingly rugged, and led through a dense forest, he went more slowly, carefully picking his way over the large rocks that obstructed the path.

He was turning over in his mind the great benefit he would receive from the capture of Geraldine Conrad, and had made up his mind if he could get the enormous ransom he demanded, he would give up his wild life of danger, and leave the country, where he could enjoy in peace his ill-gotten gains.

Thus thinking, he was suddenly brought back to the realization of his dangerous surroundings, by seeing a dark form spring from the under-brush and seize his bridle-rein, and, ere he could offer any resistance, the muzzle of a pistol frowned upon him, held by a strong and steady hand.

"Make one movement and you are a dead man," and as the stranger spoke, Wilda's face paled, for he saw before him the commanding form of the Masked Rider!

"Why am I stopped thus?" asked the renegade leader.

"I will tell you. Last night you made war upon a woman; tore her from her father's home and brought her hither. I have come to release her."

"Never, without a large ransom, masked man or devil, I know not which. You can not force me to give up that rich prize."

"Wilda Templeton—"

"Great Heaven! You know me then?" asked the renegade, in great surprise.

"I do know you, and though you do not know me, yet remember that my actions of the past few months entitle me to belief; so rest assured I shall keep my word, and, by Heaven! I swear to you that, unless you give me an order for the release of Miss Conrad, you must die!"

The spy spoke sternly, and the glitter of his dark eyes, through the green mask, proved to Wilda that he would keep his word, so he determined to endeavor to entrap him by promises, and said:

"When a man's life is at stake, Sir Mask, he will give up a great deal, and as I now am in your power, I will promise to return with you and deliver the maiden safely into your hands."

The Masked Rider stood silent for some moments, and noticing his hesitation, the renegade already began to build up high hopes of being able to secure the spy, and had little doubt but that if he could do so, the advantage to himself would be very great.

"Wilda, I will not accept your promise. I am not a fool. Listen: I always carry with me pen, ink and paper, and you must write me an

order to your lieutenant to deliver up Miss Conrad to me, as you have received her ransom money."

"I will not do it. I—"

"Then you shall die!"

The renegade leader was almost wild with rage. He knew his danger, and he loved life; if he gave up Geraldine, all his bright dreams must vanish, while upon the other hand he knew the spy would kill him if he refused.

Then he concluded to sign the paper, let the spy go to the stronghold, and upon his return with Geraldine, to ambush him by the roadside, and so end the life of a man whom he, and his whole band, feared greatly, and thus also retake his captive.

"What have you decided?" asked the stern voice of the spy.

"Curse you, I will sign. I have no other course—and quick, too, for I have business that calls me miles away from here."

"Then you must postpone the business until I have Miss Conrad under my protection;" and putting a small whistle to his lips, the spy blew one long, shrill note.

The next moment Night-hawk and Ebon came from the forest, and dismounting from their horses, approached the spy and his captive.

"Here, Ebon, take charge of this gentleman and his horse until my return. If he attempts to escape, kill him."

Wilda ground his teeth in a perfect fury, but totally powerless to resist, he dismounted at the spy's order and with a trembling hand wrote what was dictated to him, which was to the effect that, having received the ransom for Miss Conrad, she should be allowed to depart as she had come, upon her own horse, and in the company of the Masked Rider.

Carefully reading over what the renegade had written, the spy gave orders to Ebon to retire into the recesses of the forest with his prisoner, and await his coming back, while he told Night-hawk to keep a close watch up and down the pathway, so as to give Ebon warning should any of the renegade band approach.

Then, mounting his noble horse, the spy rode away in the direction of the stronghold, and an hour after was challenged by the guard, which was ever on the alert against surprise.

Boldly did the spy present his order for the release of Geraldine, signed by Wilda, their chief, and after the lieutenant had examined it closely, he told his sub-officer to go and inform Miss Conrad that the Masked Rider awaited to escort her to her father.

The lieutenant was a cautious man, and was very anxious to prevent the spy from examining the stronghold, and being afraid of him, as many of his deeds of daring and wild rides over the mountain had been so exaggerated as to make him and his horse seem hardly of the earth earthy, he was greatly relieved when Geraldine rode up and warmly extended her hand to the spy, at the same time signifying her readiness to depart, and in fact her great willingness to leave at once.

Politely thanking the lieutenant, the Masked Rider placed himself beside Geraldine, and together they rode away from the hated stronghold of the renegades.

CHAPTER XII.

NIGHT-HAWK AND EBON.

IN a few words the Masked Rider made known to Geraldine the circumstances of her escape from the toils of the renegades, and most warmly did the maiden thank him for all he had done and risked for her.

Fearing that each moment some of the band might come along, and knowing that they would not listen to any explanation of Geraldine's being released by an order from their chief, without the proof, the spy rode carefully on, and anxiously watched for any sign that might be of a suspicious nature.

Suddenly the shrill cry of a hawk pierced through the woods, and recognizing it at once as the signal of danger, always given by his companion, the Indian chief, he called out to Geraldine to follow, and hastily darted into the dense undergrowth, which afforded a safe retreat.

They had not long been in their place of concealment when the sound of voices was heard, and immediately after a party of a dozen horsemen came in sight, winding up the path leading to the stronghold.

At a glance the spy recognized the horsemen as belonging to the band of renegades, and congratulated himself upon the narrow escape he had made with his fair companion, through the watchfulness of Night-hawk, for without the warning they would have ridden upon the party ere they had discovered them.

The horsemen disappeared up the path, and once again the spy and Geraldine pursued their way, and after a ride of a few miles came to the spot where Wilda had been surprised and taken prisoner.

Giving a signal, it was answered far away in the woods, and, riding in the direction of the sound, Ebon and his prisoner soon came in sight; while the moment after Night-hawk appeared.

"Your order worked to a charm, Wilda, as you see. Now I will release you, for, although you are a great scourge to the country, making war alike upon friend or foe, I do not wish your life," said the spy while the renegade rejoined, angrily:

"You hold the winning hand now, my masked friend; but luck will change, and then beware!"

"You are free, sir; so begone, or I may change my mind," answered the spy, sternly; and taking the freedom given him, Wilda mounted, and muttering a hearty curse upon all present, dashed away, while the spy, preceded by the Indian chief and followed by Ebon, as an advance and rear-guard, again placed himself beside Geraldine, and moved on down the mountain path.

A few miles were passed over, the valley was reached, and all were congratulating themselves upon having escaped, when Ebon darted suddenly to the rear, and the moment after, his pistol rung out twice in rapid succession.

"Ha! Wilda overtook that party of horsemen, and has returned to give us chase. Miss Conrad, will you remain here one moment, and permit no one to approach you other than the Indian or Ebon, and we will keep you in sight?" and raising his plumed hat, the spy gave a signal

which brought Night-hawk to his side, and the two darted away in the direction of the firing, while Geraldine, though greatly frightened, bravely sat her horse, and gazed after the noble form of the man she was more interested in than she would admit to herself.

The Masked Rider and Night-hawk found Ebon ambushed in a thick copse of woods, and keeping at bay half a dozen renegades, who were about a hundred yards distant, and from their gestures, it was evident that they expected more aid.

A moment later the well-known form of Wilda, the renegade leader, came from the woods, followed by a dozen horsemen, and joining those in advance, rode rapidly on.

"Remember, do not kill Wilda; but let the others have it. Now!" and as the spy spoke, he raised his pistol, his two companions following suit, and together they poured a deadly fire upon the advancing horsemen.

Checked by the fall of several of their number, the renegades hesitated for a moment, and again the spy fired another volley, which scattered them in confusion.

"Now come!" and away the three dashed, and a moment after came to the spot where they had left Geraldine; but nowhere could she be found! In vain did they search for her—she was gone!

Surprised and pained, the Masked Rider knew not what to make of her strange disappearance, when a sudden exclamation from Night-hawk told him that a clew had been found.

The Indian had dismounted, and was carefully examining the ground, and turning to the Rider, he said:

"The Indians take white maiden! See, lead her horse this path; take her to British camp."

"Mount, then, and we'll follow the trail," exclaimed the Masked Rider, sternly, and away the party dashed through the woods, the Indian easily following the trail.

After an hour's hard riding, they came to a little hill which looked up and down the valley, and then, not very far distant, they discovered Geraldine, with an Indian warrior upon each side of her horse, going rapidly toward the British lines.

"We must overtake them ere they reach the outposts of the British army, for if she is seen and known by the commanders, they will not relinquish her very readily," exclaimed the Rider; and again the three horsemen dashed on.

A few more minutes, and but a hundred yards separated pursuers and pursued; but the two Indians who had captured Geraldine were on foot, and, tried by their long run, could not make great speed, so were rapidly overtaken by the horsemen.

Suddenly one of them glanced around, and discovering the commanding form of the Masked Rider dashing after them, followed by the Indian chief and Ebon, he uttered a cry of terror, and both he and his companion darted into the woods by the roadside.

"After them! They must both die!" exclaimed the Rider, and while Night-hawk and Ebon started in hot chase, the spy drew rein by the side of Geraldine.

"Pardon, lady, for my neglect in leaving you alone. I hope you have not suffered."

"Only from fright, sir. Those Indians seized the rein of my horse the instant you left me. I did not see them until they were by my side," answered Geraldine, cheerfully; for, now that she was once more under the protection of her strange companion, she felt no fear.

"We are rather near the British lines. I hope we may manage to get away unperceived, as I am so situated that were a party of their cavalry to come up, I would be obliged to take you to their headquarters—Aha! too late!" and, as the Rider spoke, a party of dragoons, led by a young officer whom the spy recognized, dashed around the curve in the road and came full upon them.

"Well, my masked friend, you are in the service of the petticoat government as well as his Majesty's, it seems!" exclaimed the young officer, who was dressed in the uniform of a captain of dragoons, and, added to a good figure, possessed a handsome, intelligent face.

"I have rescued this lady from the power of Wilda and his renegades, Lord Benedict, and intend carrying her to her father, who is an officer in the American service."

"Indeed!" said the young captain, and as his eye fell upon Geraldine, he started, for he had not hitherto observed her, and, struck by her bewildering beauty, he bent low in his saddle, at the same time removing his plumed hat from his head.

Geraldine slightly returned the salute, and then the Rider observed:

"I suppose there is no objection, my lord, to my returning this lady to the American lines?"

"I am not so sure of that. The ladies are the most dangerous rebels—pardon me, lady—that we have to deal with; and yet, I fear his Majesty's officers would find this one equally dangerous in our own lines."

Geraldine flushed at the delicate compliment paid her, but the Rider, as if not liking the tone of the conversation, said:

"This lady is the daughter of Colonel Conrad, and I suppose I must therefore escort her to General Clinton, though I dislike to consider that she is a prisoner, when she came into my hands through the cowardly treachery of Wilda."

"True, spy; but war is cruel to both men and women," and then, turning to Geraldine, the Englishman continued:

"Miss Conrad, I have met your father, and he is a gentleman and a soldier. Rest assured that his daughter will receive but kindness at the hands of his Majesty's officers."

"I thank you, sir; then I am considered your prisoner, and find therefore it is true that the British make war upon women and children," and Geraldine's lips curled with scorn, while the young officer turned crimson at her words.

Just then the sound of a distant shot was heard, followed a second later by another, and the spy and Geraldine exchanged glances, but the former observed:

"Then, Miss Conrad, I will leave you in the care of Lord Benedict, who will escort you to the headquarters of his commander and for fear your father will believe you still in the hands of

the renegades, I will find means to let him know of your comparative safety."

"I thank you very much, sir, for all you have done for me, and would send a message to my father; pardon me, please," and, bowing to the Englishman, Geraldine rode to one side with the spy.

"I saw your glance, and—"

"Yes, Miss Conrad, I wished to request that you neither mention the existence of the two men you saw with me, nor refer to having been captured by these two Indians, for they are both now dead—"

"Dead?"

"Yes, I have received the signal of their success from both Night-hawk and Ebon, and from some point they are now watching us. Go with Lord Benedict. He is a gentleman and will see that no indignity is offered to you, while I will see that you do not remain long in your captivity. I will at once go to the lines of the Americans and acquaint your father with all the circumstances as they have occurred, and I think you need feel no uneasiness."

As the Masked Rider ceased speaking he raised his hat, but Geraldine, touched by his great kindness to her, extended her small hand in token of friendship, and it was instantly firmly grasped by the spy.

"Now, Lord Benedict, I am at your service," and Geraldine placed herself alongside the young officer.

"Then we will at once depart, for darkness is coming upon us," answered the dragoon officer, and saluting the Masked Rider the party rode off in the direction of the British lines.

Hardly had the cavalcade disappeared around a bend in the road, when Night-hawk and Ebon came forth from the woods and joined the spy, after which the three started away in the direction of the American army.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPY'S SWORDSMANSHIP.

THE British commander had been delighted with the capture made by the Masked Rider, and believed that with Miss Conrad a prisoner in his hands, he could bring her father to some terms, for of late he had been greatly troubled by the daring raids of the dashing American colonel.

Geraldine was therefore assigned to pleasant quarters in a comfortable farm-house, and managed to take her captivity very coolly, for she had perfect confidence in the spy, and believed that ere long he would find some means of setting her at liberty.

Lord Benedict had proven himself a gentleman as well as a soldier, and, without appearing presuming, had done all in his power to render the captivity of Geraldine as pleasant as possible.

Seated one pleasant afternoon upon the gallery of the farm-house, listening to Rafael Benedict's description of Old England, Geraldine suddenly sprung to her feet, and glanced intently down the road, and the young officer following her glance saw the object that attracted her attention.

With a dark frown he noticed the rapid

approach of the Masked Rider, because he was rapidly learning to love the rebel beauty, as Geraldine was called by the English officers, and feared that there might be some feeling of affection lurking in her heart for the mysterious Rider.

The next moment the Masked Rider had dismounted at the gate, and, walking rapidly toward the house, politely raised his hat to Geraldine, while he at the same time pleasantly saluted the young lord.

But the maiden was too glad to see the spy to treat him coldly, so she warmly extended her hand, saying:

"I am very glad to see you again. You see I am comfortable here."

"Yes; and I can relieve your mind by saying that I saw your father yesterday, and am intrusted with this package from him, and which General Clinton has given me permission to hand to you."

And the Rider placed in Geraldine's hand a large letter.

"You are indeed kind to me, and—"

"Pardon my interruption, Miss Conrad, but the British commander has found it necessary to remove you from your present quarters, to where you will be unexposed to any attack, and also where you will enjoy some society more suited to your sex; so, if you will get ready, I will escort you, with your permission."

Disappointed at having Geraldine removed from the place, where it was so convenient for him to visit her, and with a pang of jealousy at his heart for the treatment of the maiden toward the spy, Lord Benedict said, abruptly:

"This is strange; the general did not mention this to me, and I must—"

"You must not interfere when your duty does not call you, Lord Benedict," answered the spy, with some warmth.

"I do not understand, sir; I brought Miss Conrad into our lines—"

"And received her from me. Had I not met you I would have restored her to her father, as in duty bound, for I like not this way of making war upon women. I intend to escort Miss Conrad from here to General Mountjoy's home, Glen Eden, and there she will be more comfortable, and enjoy the society of Miss Mountjoy."

"As an aide to the commanding officer, I can not permit Miss Conrad to be removed from here, without his sanction given personally to me, and I shall at once ride to headquarters and report—"

"You can do as you please, sir; but I have my orders, and I warn you not to interfere."

"Do you threaten me? Am I to understand that you defy my authority?" and the English officer turned pale with rage.

"Assuredly I defy your authority, as I do that of every other officer, excepting the British commanders. Miss Conrad, as soon as you are ready I will be at your service," and calling a servant, the Rider told him to have Miss Conrad's horse saddled and brought to the door, while the maiden, astonished at the strange conduct of Lord Benedict, turned and entered the house, to prepare for her change of residence, leaving the two men together.

For a moment no word was spoken between

in, and then the Englishman, still smarting under his insulted dignity, said:

"I know not who you are, or by what means you have gained such entire control over our commanders, but, allow me to say that I will under no circumstances put up with insolence from an inferior—"

"My lord, I bear the rank of a colonel in his Majesty's service, and hence am your superior officer, and tell you again, that, if you interfere with me, it will be at your peril," and the eyes glittered through the mask.

But wrought up to a pitch of fury by his jealousy, and the Rider's words, the officer retorted:

"I acknowledge no man my superior who is ashamed to show his face before his fellow-men."

The sun-browned neck of the Masked Rider flushed crimson under this insult, and his hand half-way sought his sword-hilt, but, changing his mind, he turned and walked away, and a moment after Geraldine came forth dressed for her ride.

"Miss Conrad, I sincerely regret so to do, but I cannot permit you to leave here thus, so you must accompany me to the commanding general's quarters, and then, if I find this fellow has not spoken falsely, I will escort you to Glen Eden."

"Pardon me, sir, I am under the protection of the Masked Rider. Stand aside, please, and allow me to pass," answeed Geraldine, haughtily.

"You can not go otherwise than with myself as your escort, and—"

"Lord Benedict—stand aside, sir," and the deep voice of the Masked Rider had a ring in it that boded no good to the Englishman.

"Hol' the guard! Arrest this man!" called out Lord Benedict to the soldier on duty at the farm-house, but stepping forward, the Masked Rider raised Geraldine lightly to her saddle, and was preparing to mount himself, when the soldier came forward and laid his hand upon his arm, in obedience to his officer's command.

In an instant the spy seized the soldier's musket, tore it from his hands, and threw it into the garden, while, with giant strength, he hurled the guard to the earth.

"Captain Benedict, you see I will not be trifled with; so let me have no more insolence from you;" but, unheeding the warning, the Englishman sprung forward with drawn sword. Quick as light, the spy drew his saber, the blades crossed, and for an instant clashed savagely together; but, only for a moment, and then the spy disarmed his antagonist, and saying quickly:

"Go and pick up your sword, sir, and be careful not to draw it in future unless you know better how to use it," he mounted his horse, and, placing himself beside Geraldine, the two rode away, leaving Lord Benedict gazing in wild fury after them, for he was considered the best swordsman in the English army, and could not understand how the Masked Rider had disarmed him so easily.

Swearing vengeance against the Rider, and with his growing love for Geraldine turned to hatred, because she had witnessed his defeat and sided with his enemy, the naturally good,

but then jealous, Englishman called for his horse, and departed in haste to lay his trouble before his commander.

CHAPTER XIV.

GERALDINE A PRISONER.

AFTER leaving the farm-house, where Geraldine had passed her days of captivity since she had been in the British camp, the Masked Rider and and his fair companion rode rapidly on for some miles, and then turned abruptly from the army-road, which ran down the valley bordering the Ramapo River, and took a small bridle-path leading up the mountain.

With perfect confidence in her strange guide Geraldine rode bravely on, and when at length darkness crept over the earth she yet felt no fear.

The Rider had informed her of the particulars of his visit to the American camp; of his interview with her father and General Washington, regarding her remaining a captive for some time longer, and therefore he had gained permission from General Clinton to conduct her to Glen Eden, the home of General Mountjoy.

"There you will be more comfortable, Miss Conrad, and you will find that Miss Mountjoy is at heart an American, although she cannot show her sympathy for the struggling Patriots, as her father's house is the resort of English officers with whom he is a great favorite."

"Had not General Mountjoy a son, who was a sympathizer with our cause?—or I should say, *my* cause, for I have not yet discovered which is your cause," said Geraldine.

"I am serving two masters, now, Miss Conrad; both consider me of the greatest value, for the secret news I give them; but at heart I have *one cause only*, and though I may appear to be useful to both, I am really of service to but one. Yes, General Mountjoy had a son, Harry; but his father, fearing he would enter the American army, sent him to Europe some time ago."

"Then only three compose the family?"

"Yes, and you will like them all. Often, though, there are several English officers visiting them; and, Miss Conrad, now I must tell you a secret."

"Well, Masked Sir, what is it, for you have excited my curiosity?"

"It is that *you* are to be a spy in camp, and from the conversation of the officers you meet there, you must cull all of the information you can, which is likely to be of service to your cause. Write it down, and as we near Glen Eden, I will show you where you can deposit it, and I will see that it reaches Washington."

"What? Am I to do all this? Poor little me turn spy?"

"Certainly! Women have often done their country invaluable services—why not you?"

"Assuredly I have no objection—especially as I now understand my father's letter, which says I must do as you request."

"Yes, and I have more for you to do. Make Miss Mountjoy your *confidante*, and, unperceived by any one, give her this package," and the spy handed the maiden a small package, folded tight, and sealed.

"You are indeed a remarkable man. Your actions, as well as your face, are masked, and

you seem to wield an influence that I could not believe possible."

"I hope that I will not always be *masked to you*, Miss Conrad," answered the spy, earnestly, and then, without more conversation, they rode on until they reached the gateway to Glen Eden, and then the spy said:

"Here, Miss Conrad, will be your post-office. See, from your horse you can easily reach the top of this post, and this little ornament upon it you can raise thus, and there you have a cavity of a few inches space. If you can not come on horseback, climbing up on the gate will answer just as well."

Geraldine narrowly watched the spy's explanations, and, after promising faithfully to carry out all of his instructions, they rode on, and a few moments after dismounted at the residence of Glen Eden.

Their approach had been observed by General Mountjoy and his daughter, and Geraldine was warmly received by them, for General Clinton had already sent a messenger to his old friend, telling him he intended making him the jailer of a fair young rebel for a few weeks, and General Mountjoy willingly accepted the charge.

Declining the kind invitation of the general to remain all night at Glen Eden, the Masked rider mounted his horse and rode rapidly away, leaving Geraldine a prisoner and a spy in her gilded prison.

Between Geraldine and the beautiful Imogen Mountjoy there at once sprung up a feeling of sincere friendship, and that night, when the maidens had retired to their rooms, they held a long conversation together upon the misfortunes of their native land, which war was so cruelly ravaging.

"And now, Miss Conrad—"

"Do not call me Miss Conrad—call me Geraldine."

"Well, Geraldine, tell me about this Masked Rider—who is he, and does no one ever see him unmasked?"

"No, I suppose not; at any rate I never have," and then Geraldine went on to tell her companion of the noble manner in which he had rescued her twice from the renegades, and that she believed he was really upon the side of the Americans, though appearing to serve the British.

"And yet, Geraldine, General Clinton said here, only two evenings ago, that he was invaluable to the British—that the Rider deceived Washington with false information, while he gave him a clew to every move the Americans made."

"Strange—and here, I had really forgotten: here is a package he gave me to band you."

"To band to me? I cannot understand it," and Imogen in surprise took the sealed letter and glanced at the superscription, which was written in a hand she did not recognize.

Slowly she tore it open, and then, after reading a few lines she turned deadly pale and looked as if she would faint. Frightened at the change that had come upon her, Geraldine sprung forward, but waving her hand, and tightly clutching the letter, Imogen said:

"Pardon me, Miss Conrad, but this contains bad news, and I can not make it known to my parents—or to any one else. Perhaps at some

time I may tell you, but not now—oh, not now, so please excuse me and I will go to my room," and, kissing her new-found friend good-night, Imogen Mountjoy retired to her chamber, which adjoined that of Geraldine, and seating herself at the table, commenced the perusal of the mysterious package, which was written in a bold legible hand, and contained several pages of letter-paper.

An hour she sat thus, and then she slowly arose, held the letter in the blaze of the wax taper, and watched it burn until only ashes remained, after which she retired to bed, and, as if utterly cast down with the news she had received, sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROADSIDE ENCOUNTER.

AFTER leaving Glen Eden, the Masked Rider had ridden up the valley for some distance and was just going to take the path leading up the mountain to the home of Night-hawk, when the sound of hoofs caused him to rein his horse upon one side of the road, and hardly had he done so, when half a dozen horsemen came in sight, and one, who was talking loudly, the rider recognized as Lord Benedict, who was saying:

"I tell you, Colonel Hunter, I will demand satisfaction of him for this insult he has heaped upon me, and I will tear the mask from his face, and expose to General Clinton the fact that—"

"There is no time like the present, Lord Benedict," and the Masked Rider suddenly confronted the Englishman in the road, while he politely saluted Colonel Hunter, the companion of Lord Benedict, and whom he knew to be a gallant officer and most estimable gentleman.

Though taken by surprise, Rafael Benedict hesitated but a moment, and then said:

"I was speaking of you, sir, and I demand satisfaction for the insult given me this afternoon."

"You sought General Clinton, and discovered that I had authority to act as I did, and are now on your way to Glen Eden to make your peace with Miss Conrad for your ungentlemanly conduct," said the spy, coldly.

"I am on my way to Glen Eden, and I did find out you had authority to escort Miss Conrad there, though how you gain such influence over our generals I can not discover; but that gives you no right to insult me, and you must answer for it."

"Lord Benedict, you are a fool: I believed you a kind-hearted man, and a gallant one, but, rendered wild by jealousy, you have turned fool," and the cool sarcasm in the Rider's words caused Colonel Hunter to laugh, and even brought a smile to the faces of the four dragoons who were acting as an escort to the two officers.

Enraged before, the British officer was now almost wild with fury, and yelled out:

"If you are not a coward you will dismount and draw your sword," and he threw himself from his saddle and drew his sword in readiness.

The Rider glanced calmly around him, and then said:

"Yes, we might as well, for the moon will give us sufficient light. This duel I do not seek,

so, upon you, sir, rests the result," and dismounting he quietly drew his sword and advanced toward the young nobleman.

"My lord, Captain Benedict, I can not permit this—" commenced Colonel Hunter, but his friend interrupted, angrily:

"Your permission is not asked; this fellow has insulted me, and I will punish him for it, or die in the attempt," and with his sword raised he walked toward the Rider, who calmly awaited his attack.

Soon the bright blades clashed together with a ring that startled the echoes of the forest, and then the combat commenced, with fierceness upon one side and coolness upon the other, while Colonel Hunter and the four dragoons stood around silent and interested spectators of the scene.

Steadily the Masked Rider pressed his adversary back, and the lookers-on saw that it was his intention to disarm him, while Lord Benedict strove all in his power to take his opponent's life.

At length, by a dextrous movement, the Rider tore the Englishman's sword from his grasp; and striking it to the ground, said:

"This is the second lesson I have taught you, sir; *beware of the third.*"

Beside himself with frenzy, Captain Benedict seized his weapon and again attacked the Rider, while his men, siding with their officer, drew their weapons and also advanced upon the brave man.

"Back, men! This will not do!" sternly ordered Colonel Hunter, but as the words left his lips, the Masked Rider placed his left hand to his mouth, and uttered a call, or whoop, so wild and shrill that it pierced into the deepest recesses of the forest.

Heeding not the command of Colonel Hunter, but anxious to aid their commander, two of the dragoons joined Lord Benedict in his attack; but the Rider had placed his back toward the large trunk of a fallen tree, and, drawing his form up, seemed anxious to have the combat begin.

Colonel Hunter's horse, becoming frightened at the shrill cry of the Rider, that officer was endeavoring to soothe him when Lord Benedict sprung forward and crossed his blade with that of his masked opponent, and the next instant, the dragoons having joined in, all were in a fierce encounter, when a yell so terrible, so wild, and so piercing echoed far and wide, as to, for the moment, nearly paralyze the attacking party, and, thus gaining a slight advantage, the Rider drove his sword into the shoulder of Lord Benedict, just as a tall form sprung forward, and seizing one of the dragoons by the throat thrust a knife deep into his bosom.

The next instant the other dragoon, who had attacked the Rider, was struggling in the arms of a giant antagonist, whose knife-blow sunk quickly upon him.

So startled were Colonel Hunter and the remaining dragoons at what had occurred, and so rapidly had all transpired, that they could offer no resistance to the terrible tragedy until too late, and then Lord Benedict was lying upon the ground severely wounded, while the bodies

of the soldiers lay near, both of them having been killed instantly.

In vain did the three Britons look around for the perpetrators of the deed; they had disappeared as mysteriously as they had come, while the Masked Rider stood near, quietly wiping the blood from his sword, and, seeing Colonel Hunter's look of surprised inquiry, he said:

"You see I am not so wholly unprotected as one would believe, colonel."

"Who, in God's name, were those demons?"

"They were my aides, colonel; but I regret this trouble greatly. See to Benedict, for I did not try to kill him, and think he is not very seriously wounded," and the spy knelt beside the man he had wounded, and tearing aside his clothing, skillfully dressed his wound.

"There; now one of you men go to Glen Eden for a carriage—it is the nearest place, and you had better take him there," said the spy.

"By Heaven! you are the most mysterious man I ever met; and now about those others?" said Colonel Hunter.

"They are not wounded. I know the hands too well that struck the blow to believe that they but half did their work," and one of the dragoons having ridden rapidly away, in obedience to the order given him, the spy continued:

"And now, colonel, I must leave you, as I have business that calls me elsewhere; but to you I trust in placing this unfortunate affair truthfully before General Clinton."

"Assuredly. I exonerate you from all blame. Poor Benedict—it was all his fault; but really, since he first saw that rebel beauty, he has been so desperately in love, there has been no doing anything with him. As for those dragoons, they deserve their fate for their cowardly attack upon you, and had my horse not kept me busy, I would myself have taught them a lesson."

"Thank you, colonel. Now good-night," and grasping the hand the Englishman warmly extended to him, the Masked Rider mounted his horse and rode away, the dragoon politely saluting, for the skill of the Rider, added to the mysterious aid he had received, there in the depths of the forest, had awed the superstitious soldier into a most respectful admiration for the unknown man.

The Masked Rider had ridden but a short distance, when two dark forms stole from the forest to either side of his horse, and kindly greeting them, he said:

"Ebon, both you and the chief have done me good service to-night. Now let us go to the retreat and seek some rest, for I am very tired." And half an hour after the three were quietly asleep in the security of the Indian's mountain home.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD BENEDICT ANGRY.

THREE months went by, after the night encounter by the roadside of the Masked Rider and Lord Benedict, and a number of changes had occurred to both armies.

In the mean time Geraldine still remained a captive at Glen Eden, and between her and Imogen had sprung up a friendship as lasting as it was sincere, and together they had worked for news that might benefit the American cause.

On several occasions they had deposited letters in the extemporized post-office selected by the Masked Rider, and promptly had they been taken out, but by whom, the maidens could not tell.

Since the Rider had brought Geraldine to Glen Eden, he had not again appeared there, although his daring exploits were the subject of daily conversation between General and Mrs. Mountjoy, and the British officers who visited them.

Though Geraldine and Imogen felt deeply interested in all that was said, their woman's wit caused them to keep silent upon the subject.

Since the night of his combat with the spy, Lord Benedict had been an inmate of Glen Eden, where he had been brought, more severely wounded than was at first believed.

Slowly he had recovered, and having humbly begged pardon of Geraldine for his ungenerous actions toward her, she had forgiven him, and, with Imogen, had done all in her power to aid in his recovery.

At length, after weeks of illness, he recovered sufficiently to get about again, but, not being well enough to return to camp duties, he accepted the kind offer of General Mountjoy to remain at Glen Eden a few weeks longer.

More madly than ever in love with Geraldine, he followed her around like her shadow, and mistaking her kindness for love for him, he told her of his almost idolatrous worship for her, and begged that she would become his wife, and leave America with him.

Astonished at his violent entreaties, Geraldine replied:

"Lord Benedict, I can admire but never love you; I feel honored at your preference, and thank you for it; but you wear the uniform of an army that is laying waste my native land, and I could never love an *enemy*."

"Listen to me, Geraldine. I will resign—I am tired of this life of continual turmoil, and will give it up forever, if you will but be my wife. I will—"

"It is useless, my lord; I do not love you, and I never can."

"Does any one else claim your love? Are you engaged?"

"You have no right to ask. Sufficient is it for you to know that I do not love you."

For a moment Lord Benedict stood in silence, his teeth firm-set, his face pale as death, and then, while his eyes darkened with anger, he muttered:

"Yes, she loves that cursed Rider, and I believe knows who he is. He has foiled me, and has had his triumph, and I have sworn to be revenged!"

"She has foiled me, and has triumphed, and I swear now to be revenged. Let them both look to the future!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ABDUCTION.

TOWARD the close of a pleasant September evening, Colonel Hunter rode over toward Glen Eden, to make a call upon its inmates, and was in sight of the white walls of the handsome residence, when a wild cry for help, in a woman's voice, reached his ear.

Colonel Hunter was one of the most gallant

young officers in the British Army, and, although a man of wealth and good family, he had not won his way up by the military scale of influence, but by bravery and ability, and his popularity was very great.

Since he had first met Imogen Mountjoy, he had loved her, and frequently had he found occasion to visit his wounded friend at Glen Eden, as an excuse to be in the presence of the fair young owner of the lordly estate.

Upon the evening in question, he had determined to ride over to Glen Eden, and to seek an interview with Imogen, and boldly tell her of his love for her, and recognizing in the cry for help her well-known voice, his heart gave one great throb of terror, as he put spurs to his horse, and dashed off in the direction of the sound.

In a moment more he came upon a cavalcade by the roadside, and discovered both Imogen and Geraldine mounted upon their favorite riding-horses, and surrounded by half a dozen wild-looking horsemen, two of whom were firmly tying the maidens to their saddles.

Without a moment's hesitation, Colonel Hunter sprung from his saddle and drawing his sword attacked the two dismounted men, who turned upon him, while their chief, whom the colonel knew to be Wilda, called out to another of his men to dismount and aid his companions in "finishing the Britisher."

At the same time Wilda ordered the other two men of his band to place themselves beside the horses of Imogen and Geraldine, and, leading the way, the renegade dashed off with his fair captives, leaving three of his men hotly pressing the gallant colonel, who in an agony of grief saw his inability to aid the maidens.

With skill he wielded his trusty blade, and, though twice wounded by the unequal contest, he at length drove his sword through the heart of one of the renegades; but, ere he could withdraw the weapon, the remaining two sprung fiercely upon him, and the next instant he would have been slain, when a shout echoed through the forest, and the renegade who was bringing his sword down upon the defenseless head of the officer fell dead to the earth, and ere the other could turn to fly, with a mighty bound there came from the bank above a form of horse and rider, and, sweeping the air with a whistling sound, the keen blade of the Masked Rider cut deep down through the neck and breast of the remaining outlaw.

"God knows I thank you, sir; but quickly! Wilda and two of his men have gone with Miss Conrad and Miss Mountjoy as captives!" exclaimed the wounded colonel, as he leaned for support against a tree.

Quickly the Masked Rider placed his hand to his lips, and again the same shrill signal the colonel had heard before pealed forth thrice in rapid succession, and then saying:

"My men will soon be here. Show them the way I have gone, while you return to the house for aid," the Rider dashed away in pursuit of Wilda.

The next instant the sound of hoofs was heard, and from the forest dashed Night-hawk and Ebon, mounted upon their horses. In a few words Colonel Hunter made known to them the

instructions of their chief, and his hopes arose as he saw them dash madly on down by the path taken by the Rider.

The pistol-shot and shrill call of the Rider had been heard at the Mansion, and the negro and Indian had hardly disappeared when General Mountjoy, Lord Benedict and two dragoons, who acted as couriers at Glen Eden, dashed up, and seeing Colonel Hunter slowly preparing to mount his horse; and bleeding from a wound upon his neck and another in his arm, the general exclaimed:

"What, you have been attacked and also wounded?"

"Yes, but not seriously," and the colonel hastily recounted the truth of the affair as it had occurred, dwelling with praise upon the conduct of the spy, and pointing to the wonderful leap of his horse from the bank above.

All gazed for an instant with surprise at the steep embankment, down which the Masked Rider had ridden, and then General Mountjoy, having temporarily bound up the wound of Colonel Hunter, said:

"It were useless for us to follow now, for before we could get horses they would be far away; but come, we can go to a point a hundred yards from here that commands an extensive view of the valley, and the entire mountain-road, and from there we can see the chase of the spy, for if any man can retake the girls he can with his two men, who seem to be perfect demons from all accounts."

Leading the way, General Mountjoy moved off toward the point mentioned, while Colonel Hunter and Lord Benedict followed—the two dragoons in the mean time having gone in search of the horses left by the dead renegades.

Upon the way to the point of land, which contained a view of the valley, General Mountjoy observed:

"There is a narrow foot-path leading down the mountains, which is considered impassable to any one on horseback; but my son, Harry, who is now in England, rode down it upon one occasion at a gallop, while in pursuit of a fox, and the deed was the admiration of the county. If the spy could take that path, he could save a mile, and head off the renegades in the valley."

The next instant the party had reached the point of land, and far down the mountain-road, and just turning up the valley, they perceived the renegades with their captives, rapidly pushing on, while behind them, at the distance of half a mile, they saw the Indian chief and the negro pressing on in hot pursuit; but where was the spy?

"By heavens! look yonder—he has taken that path, and God of mercy spare him, for see how wildly he rides!" exclaimed General Mountjoy, and all eyes were turned upon the steep and rugged path, down which the Masked Rider was visible, rushing with reckless speed to head off the renegades in the valley below, and as Colonel Hunter and Lord Benedict gazed upon his wild flight, they looked momentarily to see horse and rider hurled headlong to the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

WITH the greatest anxiety and dread General

Mountjoy and his companions watched the rapid flight of the renegades, and gazed upon the daring horsemanship of the Rider, as, seated well up in his saddle and holding his horse steadily in his firm grasp, he bounded with apparent recklessness down the steep pathway, which but one person had ever before had the hardihood to attempt on horseback.

"Who in God's name is he?" exclaimed General Mountjoy, and again he anxiously watched the pursuit.

The renegades had reached the valley road, and with all speed were pressing on to gain the hills beyond, and it was evident that they plainly saw the Indian and the negro in hot pursuit, and knew that their horses were superior to their own, for the distance between the pursuers and pursued was slowly lessening.

That they had also discovered the reckless course of the Rider was also evident, and it but increased the speed of the renegades, who were watching each moment in hopes of seeing the daring horseman go down.

In the front was Willa, urging on the party with voice and gesture, while behind him a few lengths came Imogen Mountjoy, firmly bound to her saddle, while her frightened mare bounded forward, lashed ever and anon by the renegade who rode by her side; and behind these came Geraldine Conrad, also securely bound and guarded by a renegade.

It was a strange and exciting scene, and General Mountjoy, with agony at his heart, gazed after them in helpless misery, while his two companions, equally helpless, stood by unable to render the slightest aid.

"Oh, God! I thank thee," suddenly exclaimed General Mountjoy, and the cause of his thanks was at sight of the Masked Rider, who reached the road an instant after the renegades had passed with their captives, and, unharmed by the shots poured upon him, he wheeled up the valley in pursuit.

Once upon the level ground the noble horse of the Rider, although strained from his fearful pace down the steep pathway, began to show his remarkable speed and powers of endurance, and every bound brought him a length nearer to the pursued.

At last he had steadily crept on until only a few yards separated him from Geraldine and her burly captor, and those upon the hill saw the spy slowly raise his arm; then came the flash of a pistol, and ere the report reached them the ruffian reeled in his saddle and fell to the ground, still clutching the rein of the maiden's horse, who, thus checked in his rapid flight so suddenly, was hurled back with such force as to nearly unseat his fair rider.

As the spy dashed by he was seen to turn in his saddle and speak to Geraldine, but without checking his speed he darted on, and in vain did the renegade by the side of Imogen lash his own and her horse most cruelly to urge them to greater speed; the avenger was behind, and, like the wind, on swept the gallant steed and rider, until a few more bounds brought them alongside, and then, like a flash of lightning, the bright saber flashed in the air, as the spy, standing erect in his stirrups, brought it down with full force

upon the head of the outlaw, who was hurled to the earth by the force of the blow.

Instantly the spy checked the speed of his own and Imogen's horse, her bonds were severed, and once more the noble steed and his gallant rider were flying on in pursuit of the renegade chief, who was endeavoring all in his power to escape from his terrible foe.

On they dashed; then the woods were reached and Wilda disappeared from sight, and a few moments after the spy also was lost to view as he followed his foe into the dark forest.

"Woe betide Wilda if that masked devil, for he is more than man, overtakes him! but, God be praised, Imogen and Geraldine are saved. See!" said General Mountjoy, who, after seeing that the maidens had been rescued, with a soldier's admiration of courage, had followed the course of the Rider, now pointed to the valley, where the young girls, escorted by Ebon, were returning toward Glen Eden, while the Indian had kept on after his chief.

Ebon had severed the bonds that confined the maidens to their saddles, and after returning with them to the base of the hill leading up the glen, in which the Mountjoy Manor was situated, he was seen to bid them adieu, and dash away in pursuit of the Rider and the Indian.

"Wilda will fare badly I think with that trio after him! But come, let us go and welcome the ladies," said General Mountjoy, and walking forward they awaited at the summit of the hill until the maidens approached.

With a glad cry Imogen flung herself from her horse and was pressed to her father's heart, while Geraldine, whom the general had learned to love as if she were his own daughter, was also warmly welcomed.

Both of the maidens were also heartily congratulated by Colonel Hunter, upon their narrow escape, and most sincerely did they thank him for his generous conduct in their behalf.

Lord Benedict, while offering his congratulations, seemed confused, and as Geraldine and Imogen looked into each other's eyes they both read the suspicion that the other had formed, regarding the young nobleman, and both were convinced that he had in some way been instrumental in their capture by the renegades! but wisely they kept their own counsel, and the whole party adjourned to the house, where the wounds of the brave colonel, which, though they had bled freely, were not serious, were carefully dressed, after which he dispatched a complete statement of the whole affair to General Clinton, praising particularly the brave conduct of the Masked Rider, and also informing his commander that, as his wounds would prevent him from doing duty for some days, he would accept the kind invitation of the Mountjoys to spend the time of his convalescence in their most hospitable of mansions.

This dispatch was sent off by a special messenger, and then Colonel Hunter retired to rest, inwardly congratulating himself upon his wounds which had been the cause of placing him so near the object of his deep adoration.

CHAPTER XIX.

PLOTTING AND COUNTERPLOTTING.

THE more that Geraldine and Imogen talked

over the affair of their attempted abduction, the more were they convinced that Lord Benedict had in some way been the cause of it, and watching him narrowly they discovered an uneasiness in his manner whenever he was in their presence.

"I am confident he meditates some evil against the Masked Rider."

"True, Geraldine, and he must be at once informed of the cause of our suspicions; so I will write a note at once and this evening we will deposit it in the secret receptacle," answered Imogen, and, seating herself at her desk, she soon wrote a few lines of warning, and, folding them up securely, the two maidens put on their hats and walked forth toward the large gateway, which a few hundred yards distant led into the grounds of Glen Eden.

The missive was safely deposited by Geraldine, who climbed up on the gate for the purpose, and the maidens returned to the house, and while Imogen went up to her room, upon the plea of writing to her brother Harry, Geraldine entered the parlor, and retiring to the dark recesses of a bay-window, drew the curtains around her and sunk down upon the sofa for a nap, for the afternoon was sultry, and all the inmates of the house had retired to their rooms for a siesta.

How long she slept she knew not; but she was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices, and the next moment she heard, in a voice she recognized as General Clinton's:

"But you are mistaken, Benedict; he is the best spy I ever saw, and as true as steel to the British cause."

"I tell you, General Clinton, beneath that mask I believe he hides the face of one of Washington's staff-officers!" answered Lord Benedict, and Geraldine, who had at first started to withdraw, sunk back upon the sofa, consoling herself for listening secretly to the conversation of others, that if "eavesdroppers did not hear good of themselves," she might hear something that might be good for somebody else.

Thus disposing of her conscientious scruples she listened and heard:

"Impossible, my lord, for look at the service he has rendered me—"

"What service, general?"

"Why, he gave me notice of Washington's movement upon New Brunswick—"

"Yes, after he had moved."

"True, but that was not the spy's fault, as Washington moved two days sooner than he had intended."

"What other service, general?"

"Why, the capture and bringing to my quarters of those renegades, I had that—"

"They are not rebels, my general: besides he carried others to Washington."

"True: but he had to conciliate Washington in some way; and besides, had he not turned Colonel Conrad back, with false information the night he raided in the valley, the arch rebel would have taken me and my whole staff prisoners."

"I see you are a warm admirer of the spy; but, have a care, general, for I have not seen any service which he has done you!" answered Lord Benedict, provokingly.

"Not in bringing Miss Conrad into our lines, Rafael?"

"That was *my* work, not his, for he would have returned her to her father."

"As in duty bound, under the circumstances of her capture; but, after she was my prisoner I could not resist the temptation to detain her, as I believed it would be a bar to her father's daring raids."

"Yes, you excuse the spy, general; I can see nothing good in him," angrily answered the aide.

"No doubt; but you will admit *he is a good swordsman!*" dryly added the British commander, and the face of Lord Benedict flushed under the sarcasm of his general, while he replied:

"Curse him, yes; but he shall pay for it."

"Beware, my lord. I will allow no trifling with a man I trust. The Masked Rider has twice saved my life, and often has rendered me good service, while I know of no information he has given to the enemy that has proven detrimental to our army. He has saved Hunter's life; and did he desire, could cause us much harm."

"If he wished to restore Miss Conrad to her father, assuredly it is in his power to do so, and—"

"Is it not to *his* interest to have her here?"

"How mean you, my lord?"

"Why, she might also be a spy, and by living here at Glen Eden could glean most important information for the rebels."

"And how, can I ask, would she send them the information?"

"Through the Masked Rider."

"Benedict, you are unreasonable. Your wound, in the shoulder, at the hand of the spy, and your wound in the heart, by the eyes of the rebel beauty, have turned your brain."

"Both have set me to thinking, general, and I only ask permission to entrap the spy or Miss Conrad, if I can, and prove to you *that they are both spies.*"

"Prove it to me, Benedict, and the spy shall swing as high as Haman, and—"

"And the girl?"

"She shall be sent to England, to remain a prisoner until the end of the war: but I must have proof, my lord."

"You shall have it, general. Now come, let us go up to Hunter's room, for he is expecting you," and the general and his aide, to Geraldine's great relief, left the parlor and ascended the broad stairway to visit Colonel Hunter, while she rapidly retreated from her place of concealment, and sought Imogen's room, and soon made known to the young girl all she had heard.

Imogen's bright, sunny face paled instantly, and an anxious look rested thereon, but her voice was firm, as she said:

"Geraldine, we must save him—and you."

"Forewarned, we are therefore forearmed, and let my Lord Rafael Benedict, captain of dragoons in his Majesty's service, plot against us all in his power, we will counterplot and defeat him at his own game."

With the prospect of action, the courage of the two brave girls rose, and for an hour they talked and planned together for the future.

One thing troubled them, and that was the uncertainty regarding the Masked Rider, for since

he had followed the renegade leader, the day before, into the woods, nothing had been seen or heard of him or his companions.

But, determined not to be cast down by any danger or obstacle that might confront them, they anticipated only success, and when, half an hour after, they met General Clinton and his officers at dinner, they were as cheerful as though no trouble in the world rested upon their minds.

CHAPTER XX.

LIEUTENANT MONETTE'S ADVENTURE.

WHEN General Washington and Colonel Conrad, acting upon the spy's advice, had consented to allow Geraldine to remain a prisoner in the hands of General Clinton, they both determined that it should not be known to other than themselves, that, though appearing to endeavor to effect her release, they were secretly working against it, and therefore Lieutenant Prince Monette, the gallant *aide-de-camp* of Colonel Conrad, had concocted a plan to rescue the maiden.

He dearly loved Geraldine, and they had been children together, and fondly did the young lieutenant hope one day to claim her as his wife.

Therefore he determined to make her feeling for him stronger by boldly entering the British lines in disguise, and effecting her escape.

Prince Monette was the son of a Jersey farmer, had been well reared and educated, and before the war was considered well off, so Colonel Conrad had raised no objection to his attachment for Geraldine, while she liked the handsome young man, and never having met any one for whom she cared more, believed that she loved him.

But, how strange is the nature of woman; for Geraldine had not twice met the Masked Rider, before she knew that she did not love Prince Monette!

She had never seen the spy's face, yet his eyes had pierced deep into her heart, and his elegant and graceful form, his stern voice, which, when addressing her, sunk into softness, added to the deep mystery that surrounded his every action, impressed her greatly.

That he was educated and refined, she had discovered by his conversation and manners, and that he was brave and noble she had seen for herself.

Thus, while Prince Monette was desperately in love with Geraldine, and planning for her escape from captivity, believing, with man's consummate vanity, that she was pining away for the light of his countenance, the object of his worship had almost forgotten his existence, and was day-dreaming of the Masked Rider, and plotting to serve him and shield him from his enemies.

When a boy, Prince Monette had been captured by a tribe of Indians, which, in those early days of our country's history, roamed the mountains and valleys of New Jersey, and his year's captivity among them had taught him much of their cunning, besides making him familiar with their language.

Knowing that the same tribe of Indians rather favored the British than the Americans, the young lieutenant determined to boldly enter

the British lines, disguised as an Indian warrior; so, obtaining a furlough of a few days from his colonel, he procured a full suit of buckskin, and painting his face and carefully arranging his scalp-lock, he quietly left the camp one night, and stole away upon his perilous undertaking, armed with his own good hunting-knife and brace of pistols, besides a tomahawk and rifle.

Knowing that Geraldine was a prisoner at Glen Eden, he set forth for that place, and just at daybreak concealed himself in the forest near the mansion, determined to rest until the afternoon, when he would endeavor, by some means, to get information of his presence to Geraldine.

Worn out by his unusual exertions, Prince sought a mossy spot beneath a large tree, and soon sunk into a deep sleep.

Upon the same morning, Geraldine and Imogen had taken a walk into the forest after breakfast, and though warned not to go far, for fear of another raid by the renegades, their anxiety was so great to communicate with the Masked Rider, that they continued on for some distance. Disappointed at not seeing any sign of his presence, they were about to return, when Imogen uttered an exclamation, and pointed before her.

There, quietly sleeping, lay the form of Prince Monette and believing it to be the Indian chief, Night-hawk, Geraldine called out to him, and in an instant the young man was upon his feet.

What was his astonishment to see before him the object of his search, and gladly did he run forward, while the maidens, noticing their mistake, and observing a strange Indian, turned to fly, when Prince called out:

"Geraldine, do you not know me?"

Instantly recognizing his voice, Geraldine called to Imogen to stop, and then approaching the supposed Indian, greeted him kindly, and presented her friend.

"But what brings you into the British lines, Prince, and in this disguise?"

"To save you, Geraldine."

"Save me from what, you foolish boy?"

"To save you from imprisonment—to aid you to escape;" and then, believing he had made a great mistake in revealing himself and his purpose before Miss Mountjoy, the daughter of a recognized Tory, Prince was silent, not knowing what to say; but Geraldine, discovering his thoughts, answered:

"I am staying here for a purpose well known to my father and General Washington; so you must return, and at once, Prince, for, poor fellow, if you were captured in this disguise, within the British lines, your punishment would be—"

"Death!"

All started, as the deep voice uttered the dismal word by their side, and there, half-sheltered by the large tree, and covering the form of Prince Monette with his own rifle, stood Lord Benedict, a cruel, sinister smile lighting up his face.

Resistance was useless. Certain death stared the young man in the face should he attempt to escape, while if he surrendered, perhaps there might be a chance for him; so, with a sinking heart, he said:

"I am your prisoner, sir."

"Yes, and Lieutenant Prince Monette, aide-de-camp to Colonel Conrad of the rebel army, you will be hung as a spy, for you are disguised, and in the lines held by Great Britain."

"I know my fate, sir, without any information upon your part," said the American, baughtily; and turning to Geraldine, who seemed overwhelmed with the blow, he continued:

"Cheer up, Geraldine, I am not hung yet, and there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

"Oh, Prince, to think that I have brought this great evil upon you!"

"Miss Conrad will have sufficient to do to consult her own interest. I heard her words, and she is also a prisoner, for she herself acknowledged she was a spy," sneeringly said Lord Benedict.

"Lord Benedict, you are a guest of my father's, and shall not insult a lady under his protection. He shall know of this, sir," angrily said Imogen Mountjoy.

"It is not my intention, Miss Mountjoy, to insult Miss Conrad, though why a woman should have more mercy shown her as a spy, than a man, I know not. Miss Conrad can no longer be your guest, for, after I place this man under guard, she must accompany me to the headquarters of General Clinton. Come, sir, move on in front, and the slightest act upon your part to escape shall be punished with death."

On the small party moved through the forest, Prince closely guarded by Lord Benedict, and the maidens, in an agony of grief, following slowly behind.

From the forest they turned into the carriage-drive, and there Geraldine and Imogen saw with joy, Prince Monette with hopes, and Lord Benedict with rage, the form of the Masked Spy, seated upon his horse and calmly awaiting their approach.

"Oh, Imogen, what will be the result of this?" exclaimed Geraldine.

"Wait and see," was the quiet response, and then the spy dismounted, and placing himself in front of Lord Benedict, said simply:

"Halt!"

"And why should I halt, sir?" said the Englishman, laying his hand upon Prince Monette's arm, and attempting to draw him one side.

"Lord Benedict, you are a soldier; obey orders," returned the spy.

"Obey you? Never, sir!" but as he spoke, the spy, with a bound, was by his side, his hand upon his throat, and a pistol at his head, while in a stern, menacing voice, he said:

"One movement, sir, and your soul shall be in perdition."

"What would you? I am in your power," sullenly said the English officer.

"Merely to inform you that the man whom you hold as a prisoner is free."

"You are going too far; he is a spy, and—"

"So am I!"

"Yes, and you shall hang for it yet; and that lady is also a spy. I heard her conversation with Lieutenant Monette, before I captured him."

The Masked Rider looked quickly into the lieutenant's face, and it was evident that he had

believed him an Indian, and an emissary of the maiden's until that moment; but then, after an instant's hesitation, he said:

"Lord Benedict, I have a plan on hand which your knowledge will spoil; it is therefore necessary for me to keep you as my prisoner for a few days, and I think I can explain my act to General Clinton."

"Your prisoner? What mean you?"

"Just what I say; wait and you shall see," and the spy placed his little silver whistle to his lips, and blew three sharp notes.

All waited in silent expectancy for a few minutes, and then, just as the spy was going to repeat the signal, the sound of hoofs was heard, and through the woods two horsemen were discovered, whom, upon nearer approach, the maidens recognized as Night-hawk and Ebon.

The Masked Rider spoke a few words in the Indian tongue, when, dismounting from their horses, his two companions seized Lord Benedict, and ere he could offer any resistance, he was securely bound, while two bandages were tightly drawn over his eyes and mouth.

When thus secured, the Indian chief remounted his horse, while Ebon, raising the Englishman as though he were an infant, placed him behind Night-hawk.

"Now, lieutenant, you must be off also; so mount behind Ebon. I will see you before long," said the spy, and though Prince would have lingered to have a few words with Geraldine, he was too glad of his escape from almost certain death to demur, so quickly sprung up behind the negro, who had already mounted, and both Night-hawk and Ebon turned into the forest and soon disappeared from sight, leaving the Masked Rider alone with the two maidens.

"Ah, how glad I am to see you; I feared you were killed," said Geraldine, extending her hand, and then, as Imogen also stepped forward, and with flushed face grasped the spy's disengaged hand, a strange feeling came over the young girl, and she watched them narrowly, for she did not yet know the secret bond that bound them together.

"What have you ordered to be done with Lord Benedict?" presently asked Imogen.

"He will remain my prisoner for a short while; after that I have not decided yet. But, Miss Conrad, how came Lieutenant Monette to place himself in such danger?"

"Is it any more danger than you hourly encounter?" asked Geraldine, and to the question the spy seemed at a loss to know how to answer; but then he returned:

"It is different with me; but I received your notes only this morning, for in following Wilda the other day, my horse fell into a hole, and throwing me to the ground, I was stunned; thus the Hawk and Ebon found me, and on that account the renegade escaped. We had just parted, after leaving our rendezvous, where I have been recuperating for a few days, when I discovered your approach."

"Indeed, we were fortunate. But have you recovered?" asked Geraldine.

"Yes, thanks; and my noble horse also is all right again."

"It is useless to thank you for your noble conduct of the other day. Oh, how much I owe

you, and yet I can offer no return," said Geraldine Conrad, earnestly.

"Perhaps one day you may," said the spy, with feeling, and then he added, quickly:

"Pardon me; but I must beg that you keep silent upon the subject of this morning's work, until you hear from me.

"Feel no anxiety, for all will yet come well. By the way, Miss Conrad, you have met Captain Westley Moore; he was with your father the night he escaped after his disastrous raid upon the British wagon camp. Well, he was killed a few days ago, in the fight near New Brunswick."

"Poor fellow! Oh, when will this bitter struggle end? Our best and our bravest are falling daily before the fire of British musketry," said Geraldine, and then the Masked Rider, after bidding both the maidens adieu, and promising that they should soon hear from him, mounted his horse and rode away in the direction taken by his companions.

CHAPTER XXI.

COLONEL HUNTER IN PERIL.

UPON the same morning that Lord Benedict was taken prisoner by the Masked Rider, Colonel Hunter had walked out from the mansion, and had followed the path leading to the point of land, about half a mile distant from the residence, and where he had stood with General Mountjoy and his brother-officer, and witnessed the flight of the renegades.

Though still weak from the loss of blood from his wounds received that morning, the colonel was otherwise feeling exceedingly well, and his hopes, in regard to Imogen, were getting brighter, he thought, if he might judge from her kindness toward him the past few days.

Thus building castles high in air, he reached the end of the path and stood gazing out upon the lovely valley, spread half in sunshine, half in shadow before him. Unsuspecting danger, he was considerably startled when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and the words were hissed into his ear:

"Colonel Hunter, you are my prisoner."

To wheel upon his captor, and half draw his sword was the work of an instant, but a single glance showed him that resistance was useless, for Wilda, the outlaw chief, and a dozen of his men confronted him.

"I suppose I must submit, Sir Robber; but it is hard to have to surrender to a band of cut-throats and thieves," he said, angrily.

"Be more choice in your language, my handsome colonel, for the truth oftentimes offends," responded Wilda, with satire, and then he continued:

"You thwarted me, the other day, in a pet scheme of mine, to turn an honest penny, and one of the best of my men fell by your hand, while by your cursed interference I lost four more of my band, so you see I have been anxious to get possession of you."

"If it is gold you wish, take what I have with me and permit me to go, for I like not your company."

"Too true; but we wish more than gold. Your life must be the forfeit."

"You would kill me, then?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure. You know the old adage, "He who sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

"Yes; I know you are capable of any crime; but, answer me, what is your purpose regarding me?"

"To rob and then to hang you, *mon colonel*," coolly answered Wilda.

"There is no chance for my life?"

"None!"

Colonel Hunter thought awhile in silence, and then his face paled with emotion.

"Well, do your worst: but still I would ask a favor of you."

"And what is it?" asked Wilda.

"That I may be shot down, not strangled as though I were a criminal."

"It can not be: I would lose half the pleasure of seeing you die. And you need not expect help from the Masked Rider, for he is no more."

"The Masked Rider dead?"

"His horse fell and crushed him beneath him, when he chased me into the woods the other day, and those red and black devils of his carried him away, so he'll trouble us no more," and at his words the last hope in the heart of Colonel Hunter died away, and he bravely prepared himself to stare his cruel fate in the face.

All was now made ready for the tragic act, and the rope was then thrown over the limb of a tree, while four of the men stood ready, awaiting a signal from their chief, who had stepped forward to possess himself of the valuables the colonel had upon his person, when suddenly there came a rushing sound, a pistol-shot, then another, and the next instant the Masked Rider dashed upon the scene, his eyes ablaze, his form erect, and his sword drawn.

Two of the renegades fell beneath his unerring aim, and a third was cut down with one sweep of his saber, and the remainder, excepting their chief, fled in the wildest dismay: but the Masked Rider was too quick for Wilda, and throwing himself from his horse he rushed upon him so suddenly that the outlaw leader was compelled to turn and defend himself or be cut down; so, drawing his saber he wheeled, and the weapons of the two men crossed.

Imogen and Geraldine were spectators. Having gone out to their woodland haunts for a season of confidential talk, the two girls, from their outlook, beheld the scene in the vale below, where the renegades were in the act of hanging the British officer. One glance told them all, when Imogen started off like a frightened fawn.

"The Rider, Geraldine? I'll reach him yet!" she cried, as she bounded away; and reach him she did, by a marvelous race, and a scream which reached his ears when she at length caught sight of his retreating form. Retracing his steps, he learned all from the frightened and panting girl, and without a word rode off at headlong speed to the spot indicated, there, surely enough, to find the colonel just standing at death's door.

Back upon her tracks flew Imogen, and, with Geraldine at her side, she hastened to the spot to witness the terrible combat, when, perceiving that Colonel Hunter was bound, she hastily unfastened his bonds and freed him.

The Masked Rider slowly but surely pressed his antagonist back, step by step, until by a dexterous stroke, Wilda's saber point cut the slender cord that bound the green mask upon the face of his adversary, and the features of the man before him were revealed!

With a loud cry of surprise he half lowered his weapon, and that instant the sword of the Rider was thrust through and through his body.

But as quick as a lightning-flash, it was withdrawn, and ere the wounded man could sink to the ground, the Rider stooped suddenly, raised his mask, and as Colonel Hunter reached the spot, his face was once more masked, and he was quietly tying the cord that held it in its place.

With a deep groan the renegade chief sunk to the ground, and then, half raising himself upon his elbow, he groaned:

"Oh God! to die by your hand!"

Quickly the Masked Rider knelt by the side of the man he had slain, and said, slowly:

"It is indeed cruel, Wilda; I tried hard, time and again, to spare your life; but it could not last always. Poor, poor boy; I would that now I could save you;" and the stern voice had softened, the head had fallen forward, and Colonel Hunter saw a shudder run through the frame of the strong man.

"I know 'twas all my fault; but oh, that I had died by other hands than yours. Forgive—and ask—her—Imogen—" and the wicked look fled from the handsome face, leaving it in death as calmly beautiful as when in boyhood no crime-stains had swept across it to mar its perfect outline.

Gently the Masked Rider let the head rest upon the earth, and smothering a groan, he arose to his feet as Imogen Mountjoy stole softly up, and kneeling beside the dead form of the outlaw, said, while she placed her hand gently and timidly upon the white forehead:

"Poor, poor Wilda—to die thus. May God in his mercy forgive you, as freely as I do now."

"You knew him then, Miss Mountjoy?" respectfully asked Colonel Hunter, and bestowing another look upon the upturned face, she answered:

"Yes, we were children together. But come, Geraldine, let us go home."

"Miss Mountjoy, will you kindly ask your father to send for the body of Mr. Templeton, and have it interred at his old family burial-ground?" asked the Masked Rider, and his voice was again stern.

"I will have all attended to, sir."

"Thanks. Now I will again say adieu—"

"Not until I have grasped your hand in thanks for my life, a second time saved by you," said Colonel Hunter.

"Do not thank me, colonel. I was merely the instrument, for that brave woman brought me back to aid you when I was half a mile away."

Turning to Imogen Colonel Hunter said:

"You, also, I am to thank for my life, Miss Mountjoy; but, oh, how cold are words of thanks, and yet I mean them."

"To you, sir, I will say, should you ever need a friend, one who will serve you with his life

call upon Ambrose Hunter, and his sword and his hand will be ever ready to aid you.

"To you, Imogen, I would say, that the life you have saved is yours, to bless or to shadow through coming years. I love you, and my heart, my hand, my fortune, all are yours. They are all I have to offer for what you have done for me."

A silence of a moment fell upon all present, and then, as frankly as Colonel Hunter had spoken, Imogen replied:

"Colonel Hunter, I love you, and as freely as you offered me your hand, as willingly I accept it. At heart I am an enemy to Great Britain, and as an American I glory in the name of Rebel, hence there is between us a 'great gulf fixed,' resign your commission, and then I will be your wife."

"I have already resigned, Miss Mountjoy, and as soon as the acceptance of my resignation comes from England, I am free. Until then I will not speak to you upon the subject."

"Colonel Hunter, you are a noble man. Now good-by," and without another word the Masked Rider vaulted into his saddle, his good horse bounded forward, and steed and rider were soon lost from sight in the dense forest.

CHAPTER XXII. THE LOVERS.

GENERAL MOUNTJOY was deeply affected by all that had transpired, and all of the family went with him to the ruined homestead of the Templetons, and saw the last of the race, misguided Wilda, consigned to his final resting-place with his forefathers.

Upon their return to Glen Eden, Colonel Hunter requested an interview with the general, and politely asked him for the hand of his daughter, after frankly informing him of the avowal of mutual affection which had passed between them that morning, after his rescue from the renegades.

General Mountjoy had always admired Colonel Hunter, as much for his noble qualities and standing as a brave and gallant officer, as for his wealth, rank and position in England, and felt assured that Imogen could not make a more suitable match in any particular, so he willingly gave his consent to her marriage with the colonel at some day in the future.

Colonel Hunter was therefore a happy man, and eagerly sought Imogen to tell her of the result of his interview with her father, and the lovers were thus talking together, when the old general entered the parlor, and said:

"Hunter, where the deuce is Benedict? The servants say he went out after the girls this morning, and he has not been seen since."

"I am sure I do not know. Perhaps he has gone to headquarters?"

"No, his horses are in the stable. I wonder if those renegades could have come upon him?"

"God grant not," and the colonel quickly arose, while Imogen's face became crimson with guilty knowledge; but curbing her emotion, she said, quickly:

"Father, dear, I do not think he could have met the renegades—"

"Why not? you three met them, to your cost—you see it is not improbable."

"I will have search instantly made for him, general, and at the same time send a courier after a company of my regiment—no, by Jove—for my old regiment, for if he is in the power of those renegades I will storm their stronghold, for poor Benedict would do as much for me," said the colonel.

"I doubt it," dryly said Geraldine, who just then entered the room and heard the last remark; but her words were lost upon the colonel, who whispered something to Imogen and left the room, followed by the old general, who had become thoroughly alarmed for the safety of his guest, whose mysterious disappearance he could not account for.

A short while after, the maidens saw a courier dash off, upon his way to the British camp, fifteen miles above, and then Colonel Hunter, followed by four dragoons, rode down the avenue and disappeared in the forest.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SPY'S CAPTIVE.

UPON arriving at their mountain retreat with their prisoners, Night-hawk and Ebon assigned to them one room of the cabin, and informed them that they must there await the coming of the Masked Rider.

Toward noon the spy arrived, and calling Prince aside they held a long conversation together.

After dinner, which was spread for them by the Indian woman, the spy held some conversation with Night-hawk and Ebon, and they all prepared to go forth again upon some secret expedition, while, calling Lieutenant Monette and Lord Benedict to him, the Masked Rider said:

"My lord, you are to remain my prisoner until I see fit to release you, and, Lieutenant Monette, you are to be the guard over this gentleman."

"I am compelled to take both Night-hawk and Ebon with me where I am now going, and therefore intrust to your keeping this English officer, and should he attempt to escape you must shoot him down as you would a dog."

"Soon I will return. Your meals in the mean time will be given you by Valley Flower, who will also aid you, Lieutenant, in keeping a watch upon Lord Benedict."

Then, bowing to the Englishman, the Masked Rider mounted his horse, and followed by Ebon and Night-hawk, rode from the retreat.

Lord Benedict, whose arms had been taken from him by the spy, watched their departure, and then turning to Prince Monette said:

"Do you know who that man is?"

"I know him only as he appears—as none other than the Masked Rider."

"Well, I would give much to know more of him, and I yet will. Now I am convinced that he is a spy in the American cause, and has been deceiving our generals, and by Heaven, he shall swing for it, if I once again get to Clinton's headquarters."

"He is a remarkable man, my lord, and you cannot be more surprised in his leaving me as your jailer than am I," answered Prince Monette.

"Doubtless!" replied Lord Benedict, and then a sudden thought flashed through his mind, and

he determined to risk his life upon his chances of escape, and believing he could so enrage the American as to provoke him to an attack, or a private encounter, he continued:

"Doubtless you consider that I am going to believe you when you say that you are not a secret emissary of the spy."

"Certainly—I know perhaps less of him than you do."

"I do not believe you."

"What! you then doubt my word?"

"By all means. You are at present acting as a spy, and a man who will act in that capacity possesses neither honor nor veracity."

"Lord Benedict, you are a prisoner, and hence in my power, so I cannot cause you to answer for this insult. At another time—"

"No time like the present, my rebel lieutenant," provokingly answered the Englishman.

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Because you will not. What is to prevent you, if not a coward at heart, as I really believe you to be, of restoring me my sword and making me answer to you now?"

Stinging under the insults heaped upon him, Prince Monette readily acquiesced, and together the two men entered the cabin, and while the American was busily engaged in selecting a sword from several that hung upon the wall, the Englishman quietly took possession of his own weapons, and, unperceived by the Indian woman, they left the cabin and adjourned to a shaded spot behind the hut, where they would be out of sight should the woman come forth.

"Lord Benedict, I am forced into this affair against my better judgment," said Prince Monette, while Lord Benedict insultingly replied:

"Yes, your better judgment would teach you to shun danger, sir—"

"Enough, sir; draw your sword, and may the best man win," exclaimed Prince, and he placed himself in a defensive attitude, looking very strangely in his Indian disguise and painted face, armed as he was with a saber.

In an instant Lord Benedict sprung forward; the swords met, and Prince soon discovered that his antagonist was greatly his superior as a swordsman.

The Englishman pressed the American with all his skill, driving him back against the rocky cliff.

Prince attacked Lord Benedict with greater fierceness, but with far less skill than he had before shown. Taking advantage of this, the British officer seized an unguarded point, and drove his sword through the heart of the unfortunate American, who fell to the ground with a low moan, a dead man.

Hardly had the Englishman withdrawn his sword from the body of his victim, when there came the crack of a rifle, and a ball grazed his temple, for the instant stunnin g him, and bringing him upon his knees, while, with a yell, worthy an Indian warrior, Valley Flower rushed forward, for she had missed the two men, and sallying forth in search of them, discovered the combat going on, and hastily returning to the cabin, seized her own rifle and returned, but too late to save the life of poor Prince Monette.

Instantly, however, she raised her rifle and fired, but not with fatal effect, as she believed, for, as she ran on, with a yell, Lord Benedict sprung forward, and seizing his pistols, he quickly raised and discharged the weapon, the ball entering the brain of the poor Indian woman.

Leaving the bodies of his two victims lying where they had fallen, the Englishman entered the cabin and eagerly began a search for papers of a nature that would aid him in his plot against the Masked Rider.

For some time his search was fruitless; then he found stowed away in the wall, a roll of papers, which he discovered were correct maps of the entire line of British works, while a key to the map, not yet completed, was rolled up with it, and beneath all was written, in a bold hand:

"To the Commander in-chief of the American Army, General George Washington, with the kind wishes of,
THE MASKED RIDER."

"By heaven! this alone will hang him. Now, my Masked Rider, we'll see if you deceive His Majesty's commanders any longer with your devilish trickery," and an almost diabolical smile rested upon the face of Lord Benedict, as he hastily turned to leave the cabin.

Going to the stable, in one corner of the retreat, he found there a large and clean-limbed bay mare, with saddle and bridle hanging upon a peg near the stall.

Quickly he saddled and bridled her, and mounting rode from the retreat, going through the cavern into the falling waters, and thence out into the stream beyond.

At length he reached the valley road, and at a rapid gallop set forth for the headquarters of the British commander.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BATTLE WITH THE RENEGADES.

UPON leaving his retreat in the mountains, the Masked Rider and his two companions took the road leading across the valley, and after a ride of a few hours came in sight of the mountain in which the renegades had their stronghold, and, drawing to one side, the three men dismounted to hold a consultation.

Hardly had they secreted themselves in the bushes by the roadside, before they heard the sound of hoofs approaching, and through the underwood they discovered a party of horsemen coming on at a rapid trot.

"They are renegades," whispered Ebon, for their style of dress and equipments at once stamped them as outlaws.

"See—have big chief," said Night-hawk, laconically, and at his words the spy looked more closely and beheld in their midst a prisoner.

"By Heaven! 'tis Colonel Conrad. We must head them off—come," and as he spoke the spy mounted his horse, for the renegades had passed, and, thoroughly acquainted with the whole country, he set off through a by-path, and by keeping at a rapid gait soon came to a spot where the road to the stronghold of the renegades led between two hills, the path by which he and his companions had come leading into the road through a narrow gorge.

Unsuspecting danger, the renegades came on,

riding at a brisk trot, two in advance, then Colonel Conrad, firmly bound, and his horse led by the outlaw in front of him, while behind came the remainder of the band, riding in Indian file.

The two renegades in advance had passed the ambushed spy and his companions, and Colonel Conrad was directly in front of the mouth of the gorge, when the terrified renegades saw the Masked Rider dash into their line, firing right and left upon them, while other unerring shots came from an ambushed foe.

Quickly did the spy wheel alongside of the horse of Colonel Conrad; a blow of his saber severed the cord that he was led by, and then, with a sweep of his sword at the nearest bandit, he seized the reins of the frightened steed of the colonel, and, ere the astonished renegades could recover from their surprise, had dashed into the gorge, and was safe.

"Here, colonel, let me sever those bonds."

"Being bound, they neither took from me my sword nor pistols; so, as soon as I get over this numb feeling, I am ready for a fight," said the colonel.

"Then place yourself there on the left, by the side of the chief, while I go here with Ebon," and instantly the spy took up a position beside the negro, who, with the Indian, had been pouring a galling fire upon the renegades, who seemed perfectly bewildered, and far more anxious to escape than to resist the attack.

"Hold! Cease firing;" and the clear, stern voice of the Masked Rider rung out; and obedient to his order there was a lull, for the renegades had taken up a position a short distance off, where they were comparatively safe.

"I would see your leader," again called out the spy.

"Our chief is dead," returned the officer in command, whom the spy recognized as the one to whom he had given Wilda's order for the release of Geraldine Conrad.

A long and earnest conversation followed between the two men, and then, as if having come to a perfect understanding, they parted, the renegade leader to mount his horse, and followed by his band, depart in the direction of his mountain stronghold, while the spy, rejoining his companions, took the lead, and the party of horsemen set forth on a road leading to the American lines.

CHAPTER XXV.

DENOUNCED.

AFTER leaving the mountain retreat of the Masked Rider, Lord Benedict sought the headquarters of General Clinton; but that officer had that morning gone to Glen Eden. The English officer at once set forth in quest of him, and early in the afternoon arrived and found the family at lunch, with General Clinton, Colonel Hunter and an aide also present.

So anxious was he to make known his important news regarding the spy, and desirous of seeing the grief of Geraldine, that he requested General Mountjoy to ask the servants to retire, as he had an important communication to make.

Then, glancing around him with a look of triumph, Lord Benedict said:

"General Clinton, what is the punishment for a spy?"

"Death, my lord."

"Then if I prove to you that a certain person in your service is your enemy and a spy, his punishment will be—"

"Death by hanging," answered the British commander, slightly changing color, while Geraldine and Imogen turned pale with dread, for they liked not the tone of Lord Benedict's voice, nor the evil look he wore.

"Examine these maps, please, and say what you think of them."

"They are perfectly drawn, and expose our entire lines. Where did you get them?" asked the English commander, in surprise.

"From the secret retreat of the Masked Rider!"

"What? We all believed you a captive to the renegades; you have, then, been with the spy?"

"I have been his captive, as these ladies could have informed you, did they so desire."

All at once a scene of intense excitement, and strange glances were interchanged, while all, except Lord Benedict, Geraldine and Imogen, seemed perfectly bewildered.

"Father, I can explain all—"

"Pardon me, dear lady; let me first hear Lord Benedict's account. Now, my lord," said General Clinton.

Lord Benedict at once proceeded to explain, by revealing all that had happened to him, but withholding, of course, his dastardly crime in the refuge in the hills. The nobleman ended his narration by exclaiming:

"I now publicly denounce the Masked Rider as a traitor to the British cause."

"And I denounce Lord Rafael Benedict as a murderer," and the Masked Rider strode into the room through an open, full-length window!

All present sprung to their feet in the wildest excitement, but there stood the Masked Rider, his figure drawn up and his arms folded across his breast.

"General Clinton, hold one moment. You have listened to that man's statement, now listen to mine," said the spy, sternly.

"Go on, sir," was all that the British commander said.

"I will. So far as the fact regarding the capture of Monette and his being released by myself is concerned, Lord Benedict has spoken truly; but there is more to be told, and you shall hear it.

"Now do I accuse Lord Benedict with having been in league with Wilda, the renegade chief, and his band, to capture me by foul means.

"Also, do I accuse Lord Benedict of having paid the renegades to capture and convey to their stronghold Miss Conrad and Miss Mountjoy—"

"Impossible, sir."

"It is not impossible, for here are the proofs of his perfidy," and the spy placed in General Clinton's hands papers he had received from the renegade officer who had succeeded to the command of the band after the death of Wilda. These papers were certain proofs of Lord Benedict's villainy, and well might he pale with rage and dread as he saw them in the hands of his superior officer.

"Moreover, do I accuse that man," continued the spy, "of the base murder of Lieutenant Prince Monette; but even that is not his worst crime, for, to escape, he also slew a woman, the wife of Night-hawk, the Indian chief."

A murmur of horror went around the room at the terrible words of the spy, while General Clinton said, quietly:

"Go on, sir."

"That is all I have to say, general. Lord Benedict has made charges against me, and now I will depart—"

"Hold, sir! General, will you allow this man to go? Will you believe what a man has said of me, who fears to show his face?" exclaimed Lord Benedict.

"Liar! Behold my face!" and the spy tore from his face the green mask, which had so long hidden it from the gaze of his fellow-men, and the handsome face of Harry Mountjoy was revealed!

"Oh, God! Harry, my son! my son!" cried General Mountjoy, reeling as if about to fall, while Mrs. Mountjoy sunk upon the floor in a swoon.

All was at once a scene of consternation, General Clinton, Colonel Hunter and the *aide* not knowing what to say, while Lord Benedict stood as if in a trance.

With a glad cry, Imogen had sprung forward to greet her brother; but, waving her back, he said:

"Father, this package will explain all to you. Now I must leave you, and, Miss Conrad, I cannot permit you to remain in the power of the British, with the stigma of spy against your name; so come with me."

And quickly stepping forward he seized Geraldine around the waist, and raising her in his arms, he strode toward the window, through which he had entered the room.

With a bound, Lord Benedict sprung before him with drawn sword, but the stern "Stand aside, sir!" of the spy had hardly left his lips when Colonel Hunter's heavy grasp fell upon his brother-officer, and he hurled him across the room, saying:

"Coward! Would you slay another woman?"

The next instant the spy, now masked no longer, bounded from the room. His horse stood in readiness, and mounting quickly he drew Geraldine up before him and dashed away, followed by Ebon and Night-hawk, who had been awaiting him, and ere the astonished group of officers could offer any resistance.

As soon as Lord Benedict sprung to his feet, after his fall, he rushed to the window, as if to fire upon the retreating form of the spy, but again Colonel Hunter held him back.

"Colonel Hunter, you shall answer for this, sir!" yelled Lord Benedict.

"At any time, with pleasure, if only to rid the service of his Majesty of such a scoundrel," answered the colonel, and then calling to General Clinton to accompany him, the two officers left the room.

A long conversation was held between General Clinton and Colonel Hunter, and then the former departed for his headquarters, accompanied by Lord Benedict and his *aide*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HOSTILE MEETING.

LATE upon the night following the incidents related in the last chapter, Colonel Ambrose Hunter was seated in his room in deep thought,

when he heard a light tap upon the door, and to his call, General Mountjoy entered and said:

"Hunter, I have come to have a talk with you about my poor boy."

"Sit down, general; for I received letters from England to-day which are important, and I wish to consult with you upon the matter."

"Then let us discuss this first. What is it?"

"To-day I received the acceptance of my resignation, and it has delighted me much. Also, I find that the infant heir of my dead brother, to the title and estates, is dead, and I now am Lord Ambrose Hunter, Earl of Vicars."

"Indeed, I congratulate you!"

"The title I care little for; but I must at once go to England, and before leaving, desire to make Imogen my wife. Have I your consent?"

"Certainly—and I will also go abroad, for, like yourself, my views have changed, and no longer do I sympathize with Great Britain. Only think, Hunter, none of us recognized my son; but Imogen was in his confidence the whole time that little rebel beauty was here, and as my daughter also is mixed up with this secret service, I wish to get her away."

"Yes, the sooner the better."

"To think that I believed that boy of mine in England, when he has had his negro valet there to whom he has sent his letters, to mail to us here. What a scamp he is, and then the history of his going from home, and after allowing us to believe him off for England, to return to the valley and equip himself out in that style, and get the aid of that giant negro Ebon, whom he says he knew in New York, and rendered a service to; while Night-hawk is the chief of a once-powerful tribe, and my boy once saved his life, years ago; then he went to Washington with valuable information, and gained his confidence, and then made reports to Clinton, also gaining his entire trust."

"Why, he has written me the whole account, and it reads like a romance," and General Mountjoy seemed really delighted at the skill and courage displayed by his gallant boy, Harry, now no longer the Masked Rider.

Late into the night the two friends talked together, and then the general retired, while Colonel Hunter set to work to make his arrangements for the coming duel with Lord Benedict, for they had secretly engaged to meet at a place in the valley, not far from Glen Eden—the very spot, in fact, where, a year before, Harry Mountjoy had killed Colonel Carter in a duel.

It was not yet daylight when Colonel Hunter silently stole from the house and sought the stables, where he found his orderly, with his horse saddled, awaiting him.

"Never mind about accompanying me, Porter; I will go alone;" and mounting his horse, the ex-colonel rode off in the darkness.

It was not long before he arrived at the designated spot, which presented a scene of quietude it seemed wrong to disturb, in the early morning.

Hearing voices, he turned and saw approaching the well-known form of Lord Benedict, and a brother officer, whom he recognized as a Major Vincent of his own regiment.

Saluting coldly, the three gentlemen dismounted and were arranging preliminaries, when the

rapid rush of a horse's hoofs was heard, and darting suddenly upon the scene came the spy, Harry Mountjoy.

"Pardon me, Colonel Hunter, but I have the first claim here. Lord Benedict, draw and defend yourself," and the spy sprung to the ground and drew his sword, while the face of the Englishman became almost ghastly in its paleness.

"Mr. Mountjoy, I can not permit this inter—"

"You can! This man is to meet you with pistols, loaded by Major Vincent, who, in case of your death, becomes colonel of your regiment. I have the prior claim upon Lord Benedict's time, and he must meet me, not you. Are you ready, sir, and do you prefer pistols to swords?"

Remonstrance was useless; Harry Mountjoy would have his way, and choosing as weapons swords, to Colonel Hunter's great surprise, Lord Benedict placed himself upon the defensive; but in his face there was a painful look of terror which all present could not but notice.

The handsome face of Harry Mountjoy was stern and determined, and, as the swords came together, it was evident that his intention was not to be merciful.

With a ring the weapons clashed, and then only a few moments passed ere the bright blade of the American pierced the heart of Lord Benedict, who, with a bitter curse, fell to the earth, a dead man.

"Major Vincent, I will send a carriage to take yourself and friend's body back to your camp. Colonel Hunter, will you accompany me?" and, saluting the second of his late adversary, Harry mounted his horse, and with Colonel Hunter rode back to Glen Eden.

But a short while only did he remain at the home of his boyhood, and, having been warmly greeted by his parents and Imogen, he departed for the American lines, while Colonel Hunter took the Mountjoy family carriage and drove after the body of Lord Benedict, which was at once taken to the headquarters of the British commander, the two officers making their report of the duel, after which the gallant colonel bade adieu to his old comrades and returned to Glen Eden.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

AFTER leaving Glen Eden, in his hasty flight with Geraldine, Harry Mountjoy dashed away at a rapid pace until the small party reached the valley, for they knew not but that General Clinton might send his body-guard in pursuit.

But at length, seeing that they were not pursued, the former spy halted, and said:

"Miss Conrad, I am now going to ask you to take the horse of Night-hawk, and continue on to General Washington's head-quarters, and there I will join you to-morrow."

"And you—assuredly you will not remain behind?" said Geraldine, and at her words Harry's face flushed with joy, as he answered:

"Yes, I have something to attend to yet; the chief will keep me company. Now I will write a few lines, which please give to the general."

A few moments more and Geraldine, mounted upon Night-hawk's horse, rode away, with Ebon as an escort and guide, while the spy and the Indian remained standing in the road.

"Now, chief, we will go to the retreat, and bury the Valley Flower and Monette," and, springing up behind him, the noble horse carried them rapidly up the valley.

That morning they had visited the retreat and there seen the fearful havoc made by Lord Benedict, and while the Indian gave vent to his rage in yells and the negro in curses, the spy said nothing, but swore to be revenged upon Lord Benedict.

How he kept his oath the reader has seen already.

Arriving at the retreat, Harry and the chief dug two graves and consigned the bodies of Prince Monette and Valley Flower thereto, after which they went over to the valley to see what discoveries they could make, regarding the future movements of General Clinton.

It was while they were thus stationed upon the valley roads, about a mile apart, that Lord Benedict and Major Vincent passed Harry's place of concealment; and he was slowly following them when he was joined by the Indian, who reported that Colonel Hunter had left the mansion and was awaiting in the valley.

At once surmising that there was to be a duel, Harry told the chief to await him there to give warning of the approach of any British cavalry, while he followed on, and his arrival upon the dueling-field the reader has seen.

After leaving Glen Eden he joined the Indian, and together they set out for the American army.

Seeking General Washington, Harry told him all that happened, and his chief replied:

"Mr. Mountjoy, you have been of the greatest service to our cause, and in return I now promote you to the rank of a colonel; but you can not remain here, for if, by the fortunes of war, you should be captured, your fate would be sealed. Listen: I have to send an agent to France—one whom I can trust—and just as soon as you care to go you can leave America, and become a secret agent of the Congress abroad, with, as I have said, the rank of colonel."

Warmly did Harry thank his chief, and, willingly accepting the position, he withdrew, and went in search of Geraldine, who greeted him so cordially that he at once made known to her how dearly he loved her, and asked her to become his wife. Nor was the beautiful maiden more willing to say yes, than was Colonel Conrad to give his consent; so the happy couple were made one, and a few days after set sail for France.

Ebon and Night-hawk, who remained in the service of Washington, were the last ones to take leave of the man whom they loved so dearly and had served so well.

Shortly after their arrival abroad, Colonel Harry Mountjoy and his beautiful wife were joined by Lord Ambrose Hunter and his lovely bride; and when, a few days later, General and Mrs. Mountjoy arrived, the happy family party was complete.

After the declaration of peace between England and the United States, the whole family returned to the shores of America, and, Glen Eden being in ruins, they settled upon the banks of the majestic Hudson.

THE END.

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